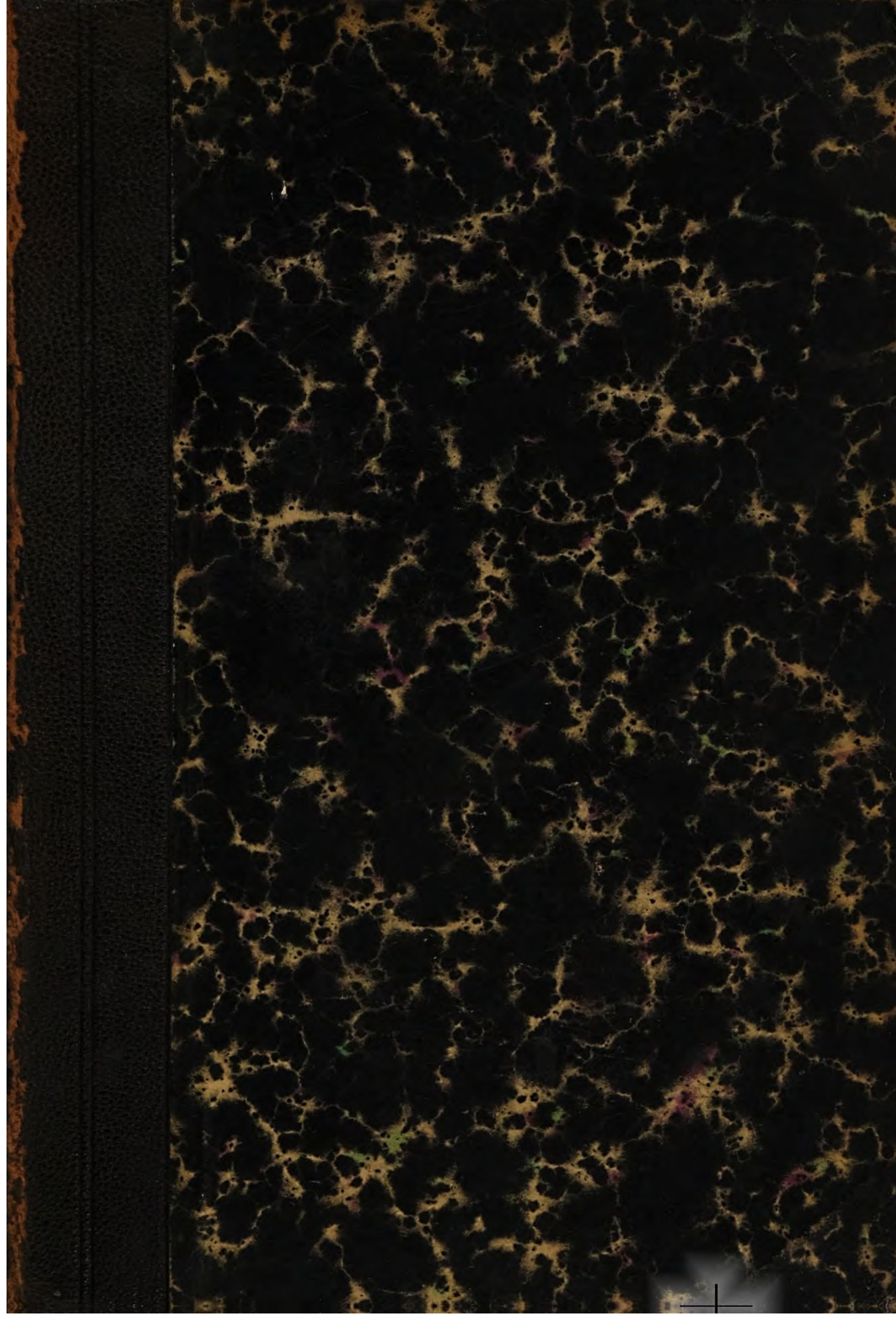




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D A W N

BY

H. RIDER HAGGARD,

AUTHOR OF

"KING SOLOMON'S MINES," "THE WITCH'S HEAD," ETC.

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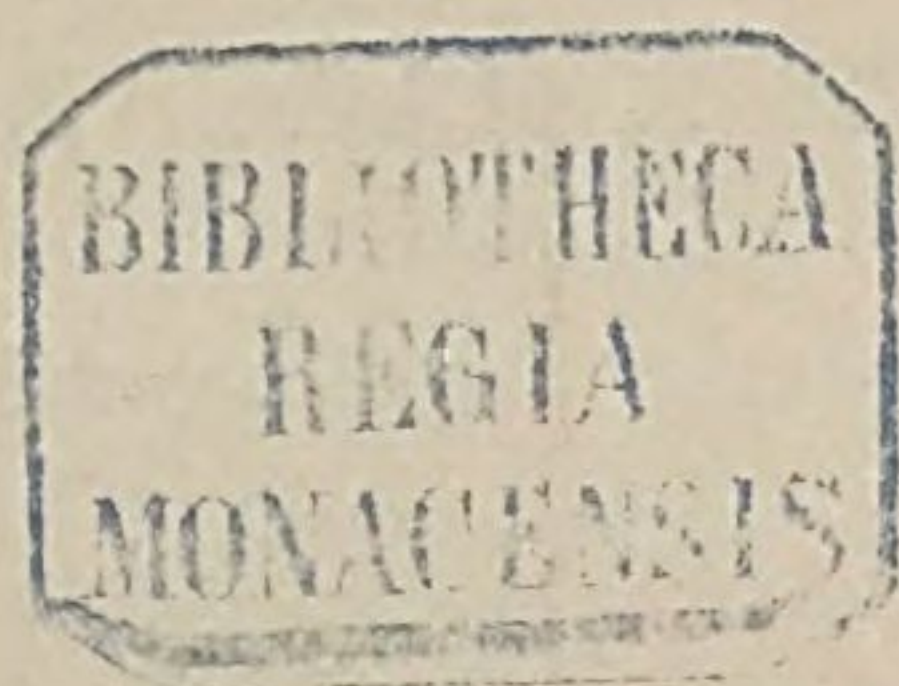
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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1892.



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D A W N.

BOOK II.

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER XX.

THE TOILS OF CALYPSO.

HAD Arthur been a little less wrapped up in thoughts of Angela, and a little more alive to the fact that, being engaged or even married to one woman, does not necessarily prevent complications arising with another, it might have occurred to him to doubt the prudence of the course of life that he was pursuing at Madeira. And, as it is, it is impossible to acquit him of showing a want of knowledge of the world amounting almost to folly, for he should have known upon general principles that, for a man in his position, a grizzly bear would have been a safer daily companion than a young and lovely widow, and the North Pole a more suitable place of residence than Madeira. But he simply did not think about the matter, and, as thin ice has a treacherous way of not cracking till it suddenly breaks, so outward appearances gave him no indication of his danger.

And yet the facts were full of evil promise, for, as time went on, Mildred Carr fell headlong in love with him. There was no particular reason why she should have done so. She might have had scores of men, handsomer, cleverer, more distinguished, for the asking, or, rather, for the waiting to be asked. Beyond a certain ability of mind, a taking manner, and a sympathetic, thoughtful face, with that tinge of melancholy upon it which women sometimes find dangerously interesting, there was nothing so remarkable about Arthur that a woman possessing Mildred's manifold attractions and opportunities should, unsought and without inquiry, lavish her affection upon him. There is only one satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon, which, indeed, is a very common one, and that is, that he was her fate, the one man whom she was to love in the world, for no woman worth the name ever *loves* two, however many she may happen to marry. For this curious difference would appear to exist between the sexes. The man can attach himself, though in a varying degree, to several women in the course of a lifetime, whilst the woman, the true, pure-hearted woman, cannot so adapt her best affection. Once given, like the law of the Medes and Persians, it altereth not.

When her eyes first met Arthur's in Donald Currie's office, Mildred felt that this man was for her different from all other men, though she did not put the thought in words even to herself. And from that hour till she embarked on board the boat he was continually in her mind, a fact which so irritated her that she nearly missed the steamer on purpose, only changing her intention at the last moment. And then, when she had helped him to carry Miss Terry to her cabin, their hands had ac-

cidentally met, and the contact had sent a thrill through her frame such as she had never felt before. The next development that she could trace was her jealousy of the black-eyed girl whom she saw him helping about the deck, and her consequent rudeness.

Up to her present age, Mildred Carr had never known a single touch of love: she had not even felt particularly interested in her numerous admirers, but now this marble Galatea had by some freak of fate found a woman's heart, awkwardly enough, without the semblance of a supplication on the part of him whom she destined to play Pygmalion. And, when she examined herself by the light of the flame thus newly kindled, she shrank back dismayed, like one who peeps over the crater of a volcano commencing its fiery work. She had believed her heart to be callous to all affection of this nature, it had seemed as dead as the mummied hyacinth; and now it was a living, suffering thing, and all alight with love. She had tasted of a new wine, and it burnt her, and was bitter sweet, and yet she longed for more. And thus, by slow and sad degrees, she learnt that her life, which had for thirty years flowed on its quiet way unshadowed by love's wing, must henceforth own his dominion, and be a slave to his sorrows and caprices. No wonder that she grew afraid!

But Mildred was a woman of keen insight into character, and it did not require that her powers of observation should be sharpened by the condition of her affections, to show her that, however deeply she might be in love with Arthur Heigham, he was not one little bit in love with her. Knowing the almost irresistible strength of her own beauty and attractions, she quickly came to the conclusion—and it was one that sent a cold chill

through her — that there must be some other woman blocking the path to his heart. For some reason or other, Arthur had never spoken to her of Angela, either because a man very rarely volunteers information to a woman concerning his existing relationship with another of her sex, knowing that to do so would be to depreciate his value in her eyes, or from an instinctive knowledge that the subject would not be an agreeable one, or perhaps because the whole matter was too sacred to him. But she, on her part, was determined to probe his secret to the bottom. So one sleepy afternoon, when they were sitting on the museum verandah, about six weeks after the date of their arrival in the island, she took her opportunity.

Mildred was sitting, or rather half lying, in a cane-work chair, gazing out over the peaceful sea, and Arthur, looking at her, thought what a lovely little woman she was, and wondered what it was that had made her face and eyes so much softer and more attractive of late. Miss Terry was also there, complaining of the heat, but presently she moved off after an imaginary beetle, and they were alone.

"Oh, by-the-by, Mr. Heigham," Mildred said, presently, "I was going to ask you a question, if only I can remember what it is."

"Try to remember what it was about. 'Shoes, sealing-wax, cabbages, or kings.' Does it come under any of those heads?"

"Ah, I remember now. If you had added 'queens,' you would not have been far out. What I wanted to ask you——" and she turned her large, brown eyes full upon him, and yawned slightly. "Dear me, Agatha is right; it *is* hot."

"Well, I am waiting to give you any information in my power."

"Oh! to be sure, the question. Well, it is a very simple one. Whom are you engaged to?"

Arthur nearly sprang off his chair with astonishment.

"What makes you think that I am engaged?" he asked.

She broke into a merry peal of laughter. Ah! if he could have known what that laugh cost her!

"What makes me think that you are engaged?" she answered, in a tone of raillery. "Why, of course you would have been at my feet long ago, if it had not been so. Come, don't be reticent. I shall not laugh at you. What is she like?" (Generally a woman's first question about a rival.) "Is she as good-looking—well, as I am, say—for, though you may not think it, I have been thought good-looking."

"She is quite different from you; she is very tall and fair, like an angel in a picture, you know."

"Oh! then there is a 'she,' and a 'she like an angel.' Very different *indeed* from me, I should think. How nicely I caught you out;" and she laughed again.

"Why did you want to catch me out?" said Arthur, on whose ear Mrs. Carr's tone jarred; he could not tell why.

"Feminine curiosity, and a natural anxiety to fathom the reasons of your sighs, that is all. But never mind, Mr. Heigham, you and I shall not quarrel because you are engaged to be married. You shall tell me the story when you like, for I am sure there is a story—no, not this afternoon; the sun has given me a headache, and I am going to sleep it off. Other people's love-stories are very interesting to me, the more so because I have

reached the respectable age of thirty without being the subject of one myself;" and again she laughed, this time at her own falsehood. But, when he had gone, there was no laughter in her eyes, nothing but tears, bitter, burning tears.

"Agatha," said Mildred that evening, "I am sick of this place, I want to go to the Isle of Wight. It must be quite nice there now. We will go by the next Currie boat."

"My dear Mildred," replied Miss Terry, aghast, "if you were going back so soon, why did you not leave me behind you? And just as we were getting so nicely settled here too, and I shall be so sorry to say good-bye to that young Heigham, he is such a nice young man! Why don't you marry him? I really thought you liked him. But perhaps he is coming to the Isle of Wight too. Oh, that dreadful bay!"

Mildred winced at Miss Terry's allusions to Arthur, of whom that lady had grown extremely fond.

"I am very sorry, dear," she said, hastily; "but I am bored to death, and it is such a bad insect year: so really you must begin to pack up."

Miss Terry began to pack up accordingly, but, when next she alluded to the subject of their departure, Mildred affected surprise, and asked her what she meant. The astonished Agatha referred her to her own words, and was met by a laughing disclaimer.

"Why, you surely did not think that I was in earnest, did you? I was only a little cross."

"Well, really, Mildred, you've got so strange lately that I never know when you are in earnest and when you are not, though, for my part, I am very glad to stay in peace and quiet."

"Strange, grown strange, have I!" said Mrs. Carr, looking dreamily out of a window that commanded the carriage-drive, with her hands crossed behind her. "Yes, I think that you are right. I think that I have lost the old Mildred somewhere or other, and picked up a new one whom I don't understand."

"Ah, indeed," remarked Miss Terry, in the most matter-of-fact way, without having the faintest idea of what her friend was driving at.

"How it rains! I suppose that he won't come to-day."

"He! Who's he?"

"Why, how stupid you are! Mr. Heigham, of course!"

"So you always mean him, when you say 'he!'"

"Yes, of course I do, if it isn't ungrammatical. It is miserable this afternoon. I feel wretched. Why, actually, here he comes!" and she tore off like a school-girl into the hall, to meet him.

"Ah, indeed," again remarked Miss Terry, solemnly to the empty walls. "I am not such a fool as I look. I suppose that Mr. Heigham wouldn't come to the Isle of Wight."

It is perhaps needless to say that Mrs. Carr had never been more in earnest in her life than when she announced her intention of departing to the Isle of Wight. The discovery that her suspicions about Arthur had but too sure a foundation had been a crushing blow to her hopes, and she had formed a wise resolution to see no more of him. Happy would it have been for her if she could have found the moral courage to act up to it, and go away a wiser, if a sadder, woman. But this was not to be. The more she contemplated it, the more did her passion—which was now both wild and deep—take hold upon her heart, eating into it like acid into steel, and graving one

name there in ineffaceable letters. She could not bear the thought of parting from him, and felt, or thought she felt, that her happiness was already too deeply pledged to allow her to throw up the cards without an effort.

Fortune favours the brave. Perhaps, after all, it would declare itself for her. She was modest in her aspirations. She did not expect that he would ever give her the love he bore this other woman; she only asked to live in the sunlight of his presence, and would be glad to take him at his own price, or indeed at any price. Man, she knew, is by nature as unstable as water, and will mostly melt beneath the eyes of more women than one, as readily as ice before a fire when the sun has hid his face. Yes, she would play the game out: she would not throw away her life's happiness without an effort. After all, matters might have been worse: he might have been actually married.

But she knew that her hand was a difficult one to lead from, though she also knew that she held the great trumps—unusual beauty, practically unlimited wealth, and considerable fascination of manner. Her part must be to attract without repelling, charm without alarming, fascinate by slow degrees, till at length he was involved in a net from which there was no escape, and, above all, never to allow him to suspect her motives till the ripe moment came. It was a hard task for a proud woman to set herself, and, in a manner, she was proud; but, alas, with the best of us, when love comes in at the door, pride, reason, and sometimes honour, fly out of the window.

And so Miss Terry heard no more talk of the Isle of Wight.

Thenceforward, under the frank and open guise of friendship, Mildred contrived to keep Arthur continually

at her side. She did more. She drew from him all the history of his engagement to Angela, and listened, with words of sympathy on her lips, and wrath and bitter jealousy in her heart, to his enraptured descriptions of her rival's beauty and perfections. So benighted was he, indeed, that once he went so far as to suggest that he should, when he and Angela were married, come to Madeira to spend their honeymoon, and dilated on the pleasant trips which they three might take together.

"Truly," thought Mildred to herself, "that would be delightful." Once, too, he even showed her a tress of Angela's hair, and, strange to say, she found that there still lingered in her bosom a sufficient measure of vulgar first principles to cause her to long to snatch it from him and throw it into the sea. But, as it was, she smiled faintly, and admired openly, and then went to the glass to look at her own nut-brown tresses. Never had she been so dissatisfied with them, and yet her hair was considered lovely, and an æsthetic hair-dresser had once called it a "poem."

"Blind fool," she muttered, stamping her little foot upon the floor, "why does he torture me so?"

Mildred forgot that all love is blind, and that none was ever blinder or more headstrong than her own.

And so this second Calypso of a lovely isle set herself almost as unblushingly as her prototype to get our very unheroic Ulysses into her toils. And Penelope, poor Penelope, she sat at home and span, and defied her would-be lovers.

But as yet Ulysses—I mean Arthur—was conscious of none of those things. He was by nature an easy-going young gentleman, who took matters as he found them, and asked no questions. And he found them very

pleasant at Madeira, or, rather, at the Quinta Carr, for he did everything except sleep there. Within its precincts he was everywhere surrounded with that atmosphere of subtle and refined flattery, flattery addressed chiefly to the intellect, that is one of the most effective weapons of a clever woman. Soon the drawing-room tables were loaded with his favourite books, and no songs but such as he approved were ordered from London.

He discovered one evening, for instance, that Mildred looked best at night in black and silver, and next morning Mr. Worth received a telegram requesting him to forward without delay a large consignment of dresses in which those colours predominated.

On another occasion he casually threw out a suggestion about the erection of a terrace in the garden, and shortly afterwards was surprised to find a small army of Portuguese labourers engaged upon the work. He had made this suggestion in total ignorance of the science of garden engineering, and its execution necessitated the removal of vast quantities of soil and the blasting of many tons of rock. The contractor employed by Mrs. Carr pointed out how the terrace could be made equally well at a fifth of the expense, but it did not happen to take exactly the direction that Arthur had indicated, so she would have none of it. His word was law, and, because he had spoken, the whole place was for a month overrun with dirty labourers, whilst, to the great detriment of Miss Terry's remaining nerves, and even to the slight discomfort of His Royal Highness himself, the air resounded all day long with the terrific bangs of the blasting powder.

But, so long as he was pleased with the progress of the improvement, Mildred felt no discomfort, nor would

she allow any one else to express any. It even aggravated her to see Miss Terry put her hands to her head and jump, whenever a particularly large piece of ordnance was discharged, and she would vow that it must be affectation because she never even noticed it.

In short, Mildred Carr possessed to an extraordinary degree that faculty for blind, unreasoning adoration which is so characteristic of the sex, an adoration that is at once magnificent in the entirety of its own self-sacrifice and extremely selfish. When she thought that she could please Arthur, the state of Agatha's nerves became a matter of supreme indifference to her, and in the same way, had she been an absolute monarch, she would have spent the lives of thousands, and shaken empires till thrones came tumbling down like apples in a wind, if she had believed that she could thereby advance herself in his affections.

But, as it never occurred to Arthur that Mrs. Carr might be in love with him, he saw nothing abnormal about all this. Not that he was conceited, for nobody was ever less so, but it was wonderful what an amount of flattery and attention men will accept from women as their simple right. If the other sex possesses the faculty of admiration, we in compensation are perfectly endowed with that of receiving it with careless ease, and when we fall in with some goddess who is foolish enough to worship *us*, and to whom *we* should be on our knees, we merely label her "sympathetic," and say that she "understands us."

From all of which wise reflections the reader will gather that our friend Arthur was not a hundred miles off an awkward situation.

CHAPTER XXI.

LADY BELLAMY PROPHECIES.

ONE day, some three weeks after Arthur had gone, Angela strolled down the tunnel walk, now, in the height of summer, almost dark with the shade of the lime-trees, and settled herself on one of the stone seats under Caresfoot's Staff.

She carried a book, but it soon became clear that she had come to this secluded spot to think rather than read, for it fell unopened from her hand, and her grey eyes were full of a far-off look as they gazed across the lake glittering in the sunlight, away towards the hazy purple outline of the distant hills. Her face was quite calm, but it was not that of a happy person; indeed, it gave a distinct idea of mental suffering. All grief, however acute, is subject to fixed gradations, and Angela was as yet in the second stage. First there is the acute stage, when the heart aches with a physical pain, and the mind, filled with yearning or tortured by an unceasing anxiety, well-nigh gives way beneath the abnormal strain. This does not last long, or it would kill or drive us to the mad-house. Then comes that long epoch of dull misery, enduring till at last kindly nature in pity rubs off the rough extremes of our calamity, and by slow but sure degrees softens agony into sorrow.

This was what she was now passing through, and—as all highly organised natures like her own, especially in youth, are very sensitive to those more exquisite vibrations of pain and happiness that leave minds of a coarser fibre comparatively unmoved—it may be taken for granted that she was suffering sufficiently acutely.

Perhaps she had never quite realised how necessary Arthur had become to her, how deep his love had sent its fibres into her heart and inner self, until he was violently wrenched away from her and she lost all sight and knowledge of him in the darkness of the outside world. Still she had made no show of her sorrow; but once, when Pigott told her some pathetic story of the death of a little child in the village, she burst into a paroxysm of weeping. The pity for another's pain had loosed the flood-gates of her own, but it was a performance that she did not repeat.

But Angela had her anxieties as well as her griefs, and it was over the former that she was thinking as she sat on the great stone under the oak. Love is a wonderful quickener of the perceptions, and, ignorant as she was of all the world's ways, the more she thought over the terms imposed by her father upon her engagement, the more distrustful did she grow. Lady Bellamy, too, had been to see her twice, and on each occasion had inspired her with a lively sense of fear and repugnance. During the first of these visits she had shown a perfect acquaintance with the circumstances of her engagement, her "flirtation with Mr. Heigham," as she was pleased to call it. During the second call, too, she had been full of strange remarks about her cousin George, talking mysteriously of "a change" that had come over him since his illness, and of his being under a "new influence." Nor was this all; for, on the very next day when she was out walking with Pigott in the village, she met George himself, and he had insisted upon entering into a long rambling conversation with her, and on looking at her in a way that made her feel perfectly sick.

"Oh! Aleck," she said, aloud, to the dog that was

sitting by her side, with his head upon her knee, for he was now her constant companion, "I wonder where your master is, your master and mine, Aleck. Would to God that he were back here to protect me, for I am growing afraid, I don't know of what, Aleck, and there are eleven long silent months to wait." At this moment the dog raised his head, listened, and sprang round with an angry "woof." Angela rose with a flash of hope in her eyes, turned, and faced George Caresfoot.

He was still pale and shrivelled from the effects of his illness, but otherwise little changed, except that the light blue eyes glittered with a fierce determination, and that the features had attained the fixity and strength which sometimes come to those who are bent heart and soul upon an enterprise, be it good or evil.

"So I have found you out at last, Cousin Angela. What, are you not going to shake hands with me?"

Angela touched his fingers with her own.

"My father is not here," she said.

"Thank you, my dear cousin, but I did not come to visit your father, of whom I have seen plenty in the course of my life, and shall doubtless see more; I came to visit you, of whom I can never see enough."

"I don't understand you," said Angela, defiantly, folding her arms across her bosom and looking him full in the face with fearless eyes, for her instinct warned her that she was in danger, and also that, whatever she might feel, she must not show she was afraid.

"I shall hope to make you do so before long," he replied, with a meaning glance; "but you are not very polite; you do not offer me a seat."

"I beg your pardon, I did not know that you wanted to sit down. I can only offer you a choice of those stones."

"Then call that brute away, and I will sit down."

"The dog is not a brute, as you mean it. But I should not speak of him like that, if I were you. He is sensible as a human being, and might resent it."

Angela knew that George was a coward about dogs; and at that moment, as though to confirm her words, Aleck growled slightly.

"Ah, indeed; well, he is certainly a handsome dog;" and he sat down suspiciously. "Won't you come and sit down?"

"Thank you. I prefer to stand."

"Do you know what you look like, standing there with your arms crossed? You look like an angry goddess."

"If you mean that seriously, I don't understand you. If it is a compliment, I don't like compliments."

"You are not very friendly," said George, whose temper was fast getting the better of him.

"I am sorry. I do not wish to be unfriendly."

"So I hear that my ward has been staying here whilst I was ill."

"Yes, he was staying here."

"And I am also told that there was some boy-and-girl love affair between you. I suppose that he indulged in a flirtation to while away the time."

Angela turned upon him, too angry to speak.

"Well, you need not look at me like that. You surely never expect to see him again, do you?"

"If we both live, I shall certainly see him again; indeed, I shall, in any case."

"You will never see him again."

"Why not?"

"Because he was only flirting and playing the fool

with you. He is a notorious flirt, and, to my certain knowledge, has been engaged to two women before."

"I do not believe that that is true, or, if it is true, it is not all the truth; but, true or untrue, I am not going to discuss Mr. Heigham with you, or allow myself to be influenced by stories told behind his back."

"Angela," said George, rising, and seizing her hand.

She turned quite pale, and a shudder passed over her frame.

"Leave my hand alone, and never dare to touch me again. This is the second time that you have tried to insult me."

"So!" answered George, furious with outraged pride and baffled passion, "you set up your will against mine, do you? Very well, you shall see. I will crush you to powder. Insult you, indeed! How often did that young blackguard insult you? I warrant he did more than take your hand."

"If," answered Angela, "you mean Mr. Heigham, I shall leave you to consider whether that term is not more applicable to the person who does his best to outrage an unprotected woman, and take advantage of the absent, than to the gentleman against whom you have used it;" and, darting on him one glance of supreme contempt, she swept away like an angry queen.

Left to his meditations, George shook his fist towards where she had vanished.

"Very well, my fine lady, very well," he said aloud. "You treat me as so much dirt, do you? You shall smart for this, so sure as my name is George Caresfoot. Only wait till you are in my power, and you shall learn that I was never yet defied with impunity. Oh! and you shall learn many other things also."

From this time forward, for a period of two months or more, Angela was subjected to an organised persecution as harassing as it was cruel. George waylaid her everywhere, and twice actually succeeded in entering into conversation with her, but on both occasions she managed to escape from him before he could proceed any further. So persistently did he hunt her, that at last the wretched girl was driven to hide herself away in odd corners of the house and woods, in order to keep out of his way. Then he began to write her letters, and send handsome presents, all of which she returned.

Poor Angela! It was hard both to lose her lover and to suffer daily from the persecutions of her hateful cousin, which were now pushed forward so openly and with such pertinacity as to fill her with vague alarm. What made her position worse was, that she had no one in whom to confide, for Mr. Fraser had not yet returned. Pigott indeed knew more or less what was going on, but she could do nothing, except bewail Arthur's absence, and tell her "not to mind." There remained her father, but with him she had never been on sufficiently intimate terms for confidences. Indeed, as time went on, the suspicion gathered strength in her mind that he was privy to George's advances, and that those advances had something to do with the harsh terms imposed upon Arthur and herself. But at last matters grew so bad that, having no other refuge, she determined to appeal to him for protection.

"Father," she said, boldly, one day to Philip, as he was sitting writing in his study, "my cousin George is persecuting me every day. I have borne it as long as I can, but I can bear it no longer. I have come to ask you to protect me from him."

"Why, Angela, I should have thought that you were perfectly capable of protecting yourself. What is he persecuting you about? What does he want?"

"To marry me, I suppose," answered Angela, blushing to her eyes.

"Well, that is a very complimentary wish on his part, and I can tell you what it is, Angela, if only you could get that young Heigham out of your head, you might do a deal worse."

"It is quite useless to talk to me thus," she answered, coldly.

"Well, that is your affair; but it is very ridiculous of you to come and ask me to protect you. The woman must, indeed, be a fool who cannot protect herself."

And so the interview ended.

Next day Lady Bellamy called again.

"My dear child," she said to Angela, "you are not looking well; this business worries you, no doubt; it is the old struggle between duty and inclination, that we have most of us gone through. Well, there is one consolation; nobody who did his or her duty, regardless of inclination, ever regretted it in the end."

"What do you mean, Lady Bellamy, when you talk about my duty?"

"I mean the plain duty that lies before you of marrying your cousin George, and of throwing up this young Heigham."

"I recognise no such duty."

"My dear Angela, do look at the matter from a sensible point of view, think what a good thing it would be for your father, and remember, too, that it would re-unite all the property. If ever a girl had a clear duty to perform, you have."

"Since you insist so much upon my 'duty,' I must say that it seems to me that an honest girl in my position has three duties to consider, and not one, as you say, Lady Bellamy. First, there is her duty to the man she loves, for her the greatest duty of any in the world; next her duty to herself, for her happiness and self-respect are involved in her decision; and, lastly, her duty to her family. I put the family last, because, after all, it is she who gets married, not her family."

Lady Bellamy smiled a little.

"You argue well; but there is one thing that you overlook, though I am sorry to have to pain you by saying it; young Mr. Heigham is no better than he should be. I have made inquiries about him, and think that I ought to tell you that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that his life, young as he is, has not been so creditable as it might have been. He has been the hero of one or two little affairs. I can tell you about them if you like."

"Lady Bellamy, your stories are either true or untrue. If true, I should take no notice of them, because they must have happened before he loved me; if untrue, they would be a mere waste of breath; so I think that we may dispense with the stories—they would influence me no more than the hum of next summer's gnats."

Lady Bellamy smiled again.

"You are a curious woman," she said; "but, supposing that there were to be a repetition of these little stories *after* he loved you, what would you say then?"

Angela looked troubled, and thought a while.

"He could never go far from me," she answered.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I hold the strings of his heart in my hands, and I have only to lift them to draw him back to me—so. No other woman, no living force, can keep him from me, if I choose to bid him come."

"Supposing that to be so, how about the self-respect you spoke of just now? Could you bear to take your lover back from the hands of another woman?"

"That would entirely depend upon the circumstances, and upon what was just to the other woman."

"You would not then throw him up without question?"

"Lady Bellamy, I may be very ignorant and simple, but I am neither mad nor a fool. What do you suppose that my life would be worth to me if I threw Arthur up? If I remained single it would be an aching void, as it is now, and if I married any other man whilst he still lived, it would become a daily and shameful humiliation such as I had rather die than endure."

Lady Bellamy glanced up from under her heavy-lidded eyes; a thought had evidently struck her, but she did not express it.

"Then I am to tell your cousin George that you will have absolutely nothing to do with him?"

"Yes, and beg him to cease persecuting me; it is quite useless; if there were no Arthur and no other man in the world, I would not marry him. I detest him—I cannot tell you how I detest him."

"It is amusing to hear you talk so, and to think that you will certainly be Mrs. George Caresfoot within nine months."

"Never," answered Angela, passionately stamping her foot upon the floor. "What makes you say such horrible things?"

"I reflect," answered Lady Bellamy with an ominous

smile, "that George Caresfoot has made up his mind to marry you, and that I have made up mine to help him to do so, and that your will, strong as it certainly is, is as compared with our wills, what a straw is to a gale. The straw cannot travel against the wind, it *must* go with it, and you *must* marry George Caresfoot. You will as certainly come to the altar-rails with him as you will to your death-bed. It is written in your face. Good-bye."

For the first time Angela's courage really gave way as she heard these dreadful words. She remembered that she herself had called Lady Bellamy an embodiment of the "Spirit of Power," and now she felt that the comparison was just. The woman was power incarnate, and her words, which she would have laughed at, coming from anybody else, sent a cold chill through her.

"She is a fine creature, both in mind and body," reflected Lady Bellamy, as she stepped into her carriage. "Really, though I try to hate her, I can find it in my heart to be sorry for her. Indeed, I am not sure that I do not like her; certainly I respect her. But she has come in my path and must be crushed—my own safety demands it. At least, she is worth crushing, and the game is fair, for perhaps she will crush me. I should not be surprised; there is a judgment in those grey eyes of hers—*Qui vivra verra*. Home, William."

CHAPTER XXII.

PHILIP DRIVES A BARGAIN.

ANGELA's appeal for protection set Philip thinking.

As the reader is aware, his sole motive in consenting to become, as it were, a sleeping partner in the shameful plot, of which his innocent daughter was the object,

was to obtain possession of his lost inheritance, and it now occurred to him that even should that plot succeed, which he very greatly doubted, nothing had as yet been settled as to the terms upon which it was to be reconveyed to him. The whole affair was excessively repugnant to him: indeed, he regarded the prospect of its success with little less than terror, only his greed overmastered his fear.

But on one point he was very clear: it should not succeed except upon the very best of terms for himself, his daughter should not be sacrificed unless the price paid for the victim was positively princely, such guilt was not to be incurred for a bagatelle. If George married Angela, the Isleworth estates must pass back into his hands for a very low sum indeed. But would his cousin be willing to accept such a sum? That was the rub, and that, too, was what must be made clear without any further delay. He had no wish to see Angela put to needless suffering, suffering that would not bring an equivalent with it, and which might, on the contrary, entail consequences upon himself that he shuddered to think of.

Curiously enough, however, he had of late been signally free from his superstitious fears; indeed, since the night when he had so astonished Arthur by his outbreak about the shadows on the wall, no fit had come to trouble him, and he was beginning to look upon the whole thing as an evil dream, a nightmare that he had at last lived down. But still the nightmare might return, and he was not going to run the risk unless he was very well paid for it. And so he determined to offer a price so low for the property that no man in his senses would accept it. Then he wrote a note to George asking him

to come over on the following evening after dinner, as he wished to speak to him on a matter of business.

"There," he said to himself, "that will make an end of the affair, and I will get young Heigham back and they can be married. George can never take what I mean to offer; if he should, the Egyptian will be spoiled indeed, and the game will be worth the candle. Not that I have any responsibility about it, however; I shall put no pressure on Angela, she must choose for herself." And Philip went to bed, quite feeling as though he had done a virtuous action.

George came punctually enough on the following evening; it was that of the day of Lady Bellamy's conversation with Angela, a conversation which had so upset the latter that she had already gone to her room, not knowing anything of her cousin's proposed visit.

The night was one of those dreadfully oppressive ones that sometimes visit us in the course of an English summer. The day had been hot and sultry, and with the fall of the evening the little breeze that stirred in the thunder-laden air had died away, leaving the temperature at much the same point that is to be expected in a tropical valley, and rendering the heat of the house almost unbearable.

"How do you do, George?" said Philip. "Hot, isn't it?"

"Yes, there will be a tempest soon."

"Not before midnight, I think. Shall we go and walk down by the lake; it will be cooler there, and we shall be quite undisturbed? Walls have ears sometimes, you know."

"Very well; but where is Angela?"

"I met her on the stairs just now, and she said that she was going to bed—got a headache, I believe. Shall we start?"

So soon as they were well away from the house, Philip broke the ice.

"Some months back, I had a conversation with Lady Bellamy on the subject of a proposal that you made to me through her for Angela's hand. It is about that I wish to speak to you now. First, I must ask you if you still wish to go on with the business?"

"Certainly, I wish it more than ever."

"Well, as I intimated to Lady Bellamy, I do not at all approve of your suit. Angela, subject to my consent, is already very suitably engaged to your late ward, a young fellow whom, whatever you may think about him, I like very much; and I can assure you that it will require the very strongest inducement to make me even allow such a thing. In any case, I will have nothing to do with influencing Angela; she is a perfectly free agent."

"Which means, I suppose, that you intend to screw down the price?"

"In wanting to marry Angela," went on Philip, "you must remember that you fly high. She is a very lovely woman, and, what is more, will some day or other be exceedingly well off, whilst you—you must excuse my being candid, but this is a mere matter of business, and I am only talking of you in the light of a possible son-in-law—you are a middle-aged man, not prepossessing in appearance, broken in health, and, however well you may have kept up your reputation in these parts, as you and I well know, without a single shred of character left; altogether not a man to whom a father would marry a daughter of his own free will, or one with whom a young girl is likely to find happiness."

"You draw a flattering picture of me, I must say."

"Not at all, only a true one."

"Well, if I am all you say, how is it that you are prepared to allow your daughter to marry me at all?"

"I will tell you; because the rights of property should take precedence of the interests of a single individual. Because my father and you between you cozened me out of my lawful own, and this is the only way that I see of coming by it again."

"What does it matter? In any case after your death the land will come back to Angela and her children."

"No, George, it will not; if ever the Isleworth estates come into my hands, they shall not pass again to any child of yours."

"What would you do with them, then?"

"Marry, and get children of my own, or leave them elsewhere."

George whistled.

"Well, I must say that your intentions are amiable, but you have not got the estates yet, my dear cousin."

"No, and never shall have, most likely; but let us come to the point. Although I do not approve of your advances, I am willing to waive my objections and accept you as a son-in-law, if you can win Angela's consent, provided that before the marriage you consent to give me clear transfer, at a price, of all the Isleworth estates, with the exception of the mansion and the pleasure-grounds."

"Very good; but now about the price. That is the real point."

They had taken a path that ran down through the shrubberies to the side of the lake, and then turned up towards Caresfoot's Staff. Before answering George's remark, Philip proposed that they should sit down, and, suiting the action to the word, placed himself upon the

trunk of a fallen tree that lay by the water's edge, just outside the spread of the branches of the great oak, and commanding a view of the area beneath them.

"The moon will come out again presently," he said, when George had followed his example. "She has got behind that thunder-cloud. Ah!" as a bright flash of lightning passed from heaven to earth, "I thought that we should get a storm; it will be here in half an hour."

All this Philip said to gain time; he had not quite made up his mind what price to offer.

"Never mind the lightning. What do you offer for the property, inclusive of timber, and with all improvements—just as it stands, in short?"

"One hundred thousand pounds cash," said Philip, deliberately.

George sprang from his seat and sat down again before he answered—

"Do you think that I am drunk, or a fool, that you come to me with such a ridiculous offer? Why, the probate valuation was two hundred thousand, and that was very low."

"I offer one hundred thousand, and am willing to settle thirty thousand absolutely on the girl should she marry you, and twenty thousand more on my death. That is my offer—take it, or leave it."

"Talk sense, man; your terms are preposterous."

"I tell you that, preposterous or not, I will not go beyond them. If you don't like them, well and good, leave them alone, and I'll put myself in communication with young Heigham to-morrow, and tell him that he can come and marry the girl as soon as he likes. For my part, I am very glad to have the business settled."

"You ask me to sacrifice half my property," groaned George.

"My property, you mean, that you stole. But I don't ask you to do anything one way or the other. I am to understand that you refuse my offer?"

"Give me a minute to think," and George hid his face in his hands, and Philip, looking at him with hatred gleaming in his dark eyes, muttered between his teeth—

"I believe that my turn has come at last."

When some thirty seconds had passed in silence, the attention of the pair was attracted by the cracking of dead leaves that sounded quite startling in the intense stillness of the night, and next second a tall figure in white glided up to the water's edge, and stood still within half a dozen paces of them.

Involuntarily Philip gripped his cousin's arm, but neither of them moved. The sky had rapidly clouded up, and the faint light that struggled from the moon only served to show that the figure appeared to be lifting its arms. In another second that was gone too, and the place was totally dark.

"Wait till the moon comes out, and we shall see what it is," whispered George, and, as he spoke, there came from the direction of the figure a rustling sound as of falling garments.

"What can it be?" whispered Philip.

They were not left long in doubt, for at that instant a vivid flash from the thunder-cloud turned the darkness into the most brilliant day, and revealed a woman standing up to her knees in the water, with her arms lifted, knotting her long hair. It was Angela. For one moment the fierce light shone upon the stately form that gleamed whiter than ivory—white as snow against the dense back-

ground of the brushwood—and, as it passed, they heard her sink into the water softly as a swan, and strike out with steady strokes towards the centre of the lake.

“It is only Angela,” said Philip, when the sound of the strokes grew faint. “Phew! what a start she gave me!”

“Is she safe?” asked George, in a husky voice. “Hadn’t I better get a boat?”

“She needs no help from you, she is quite capable of looking after herself, especially in the water, I can tell you,” Philip answered, sharply.

Nothing more was said till they reached the house, when, on entering the lighted study, Philip noticed that his cousin’s face was flushed, and his hands shaking like aspen leaves.

“Why, what is the matter with you, man?” he asked.

“Nothing—nothing. I am only rather cold. Give me some brandy.”

“Cold on such a night as this? That’s curious,” said Philip, as he got the spirit from a cupboard.

George drank about a wine-glassful neat, and seemed to recover himself.

“I accept your offer for the land, Philip,” he said, presently.

His cousin looked at him curiously, and a brilliant idea struck him.

“You agree, then, to take *fifty* thousand pounds for the Isleworth estates in the event of your marrying my daughter, the sale to be completed before the marriage takes place?”

“Fifty thousand! No, a hundred thousand—you said a hundred thousand just now.”

“You must have misunderstood me, or I must have made a mistake; what I meant and mean is *fifty thou-*

sand, and you to put a thousand down as earnest money—to be forfeited whether the affair comes off or not.”

George ground his teeth and clutched at his red hair, proceedings that his cousin watched with a great deal of quiet enjoyment. When at length he spoke, it was in a low, hoarse voice; quite unlike his usual hard tones—

“Damn you!” he said, “you have me at your mercy. Take the land for the money, if you like, though it will nearly ruin me. That woman has turned my head; I *must* marry her, or I shall go mad.”

“Very good; that is your affair. Remember that I have no responsibility in the matter, and that I am not going to put any pressure on Angela. If you want to marry her, you must win her within the next eight months. Then that is settled. I suppose that you will pay in the thousand to-morrow. The storm is coming up fast, so I won’t keep you. Good-night,” and they separated, George to drive home—with fever in his heart, and the thunder-storm, of which he heard nothing, rattling round him—and Philip to make his way to bed, with the dream of his life advanced a step nearer realisation.

“That was a lucky swim of Angela’s to-night,” he thought. “Fifty thousand pounds for the estate. He is right; he must be going mad. But will he get her to marry him, I wonder. If he does, I shall cry quits with him indeed.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

GEORGE PRESSES HIS SUIT.

GEORGE had spoken no falsehood when he said that he felt as though he must marry Angela or go mad. In-

deed, it is a striking proof of how necessary he thought that step to be to his happiness, that he had been willing to consent to his cousin's Shylock-like terms about the sale of the property, although they would in their result degrade him from his position as a large landed proprietor, and make a comparatively poor man of him. The danger or suffering that could induce a Caresfoot to half ruin himself with his eyes open had need to be of an extraordinarily pressing nature.

Love's empire is this globe and all mankind; the most refined and the most degraded, the cleverest and the most stupid, are all liable to become his faithful subjects. He can alike command the devotion of an archbishop and a South-Sea Islander, of the most immaculate maiden lady (whatever her age) and of the savage Zulu girl. From the pole to the equator, and from the equator to the further pole, there is no monarch like Love. Where he sets his foot, the rocks bloom with flowers, or the garden becomes a wilderness according to his goodwill and pleasure, and at his whisper all other allegiances melt away like ropes of sand. He is the real arbiter of the destinies of the world.

But to each nature of all the millions beneath his sway, Love comes in a fitting guise; to some as an angel messenger, telling of sympathy and peace, and a strange new hope; to others draped in sad robes indeed, but still divine. Thus when he visits such a one as George Caresfoot, it is as a potent fiend, whose mission is to enter through man's lower nature, to torture and destroy; to scorch the heart with fearful heats, and then to crush it, and leave its owner's bosom choked with bitter dust.

And, so far as George is concerned, there is no doubt but what the work was done right well, for under the

influence of what is, with doubtful propriety, known as the "tender passion," that estimable character was rapidly drifting within a measurable distance of a lunatic asylum. The checks and repulses that he had met with, instead of cooling his ardour, had only the effect of inflaming it to an extraordinary degree. Angela's scornful dislike, as water thrown upon burning oil, did but diffuse the flames of his passion throughout the whole system of his mind, till he grew wild with its heat and violence. Her glorious beauty daily took a still stronger hold upon his imagination, till it scorched into his very soul. For whole nights he could not sleep, for whole days he would scarcely eat or do anything but walk, walk, walk, and try to devise means to win her to his side. The irritation of his mind produced its natural effects upon his conduct, and he would burst into fits of the most causeless fury. In one of these he dismissed every servant in the house, and so evil was his reputation among that class, that he had great difficulty in obtaining others to take their places. In another he hurled a heavy pot containing an azalea-bush at the head of one of the gardeners, and had to compromise an action for assault. In short, the lunatic asylum loomed very near indeed.

For a week or so after the memorable night of his interview with Philip, an interview that he, at least, would never forget, George was quite unable, try as he would, to get a single word with Angela.

At last, one day, when he was driving, by a seldom-used road, past the fields near the Abbey House on his way from Roxham, chance gave him the opportunity that he had for so long sought without success. For, far up a bye-lane that led to a turnip-field, his eye caught sight of the flutter of a grey dress vanishing round a corner,

something in the make of which suggested to him that Angela was its wearer. Giving the reins to the servant, and bidding him drive on home, he got out of the dog-cart and hurried up the grassy track, and on turning the corner came suddenly upon the object of his search. She was standing on the bank of the hedge-row, and struggling with a bough of honeysuckle from which she wished to pluck its last remaining autumn bloom. So engaged was she that she did not hear his step, and it was not until his hard voice grated on her ear that she knew that she was trapped.

"Caught at last. You have given me a pretty hunt, Angela."

The violent start she gave effectually carried out her purpose as regarded the honeysuckle, which snapped in two under the strain of her backward jerk, and she turned round upon him panting with fear and exertion, the flowery bough grasped within her hand.

"Am I, then, a wild creature, that you should hunt me so?"

"Yes, you are the loveliest and the wildest of creatures, and, now I have caught you, you must listen to me."

"I will not listen to you; you have nothing to say to me that can interest me; I will not listen to you."

George laughed a little—a threatening, nervous laugh.

"I am accustomed to have my own way, Angela, and I am not going to give it up now. You must and you shall listen. I have got my opportunity at last, and I mean to use it. I am sorry to have to speak so roughly, but you have only yourself to thank; you have driven me to it."

His determination frightened her, and she took refuge in an armour of calm and freezing contempt.

"I don't understand you," she said.

"On the contrary, you understand me very well. You always avoid me; I can never see you, try how I will. Perhaps," he went on, still talking quite quietly, "if you knew what a hell there is in my heart and brain you would not treat me so. I tell you that I am in torture," and the muscles of the pallid face twitched in a way that went far to confirm his words.

"I do not understand your meaning, unless, indeed, you are trying to frighten and insult me, as you have done before," answered Angela.

Poor girl, she did not know what else to say; she was not of a nervous disposition, but there was something about George's manner that alarmed her very much, and she glanced anxiously around to see if any one was within call, but the place was lonely as the grave.

"There is no need for you to look for help, I wish neither to frighten nor insult you; my suit is an honourable one enough. I wish you to promise to marry me, that is all; you must and shall promise it, I will take no refusal. You were made for me and I for you; it is quite useless for you to resist me, for you must marry me at last. I love you, and by that right you belong to me. I love you—I love you."

"You—love—me—you——"

"Yes, I do, and why should you look at me like that? I cannot help it; you are so beautiful; if you knew your own loveliness, you would understand me. I love those grey eyes of yours even when they flash and burn as they do now. Ah! they shall look softly at me yet, and those sweet lips that curl so scornfully shall shape themselves to kiss me. Listen, I loved you when I first saw you there in the drawing-room at Isleworth, I

loved you more and more all the time that I was ill, and now I love you to madness. So you see, Angela, you *must* marry me soon."

"*I* marry you!"

"Oh! don't say you won't; for God's sake, don't say you won't," said George, with a sudden change of manner from the confident to the supplicatory. "Look, I beg you not to, on my knees," and he actually flung himself down on the grass roadway and grovelled before her in an abandonment of passion hideous to behold.

She turned very pale, and answered him in a cold, quiet voice, every syllable of which fell upon him like the stroke of a whip.

"Such a thing would be quite impossible for many reasons, but I need only state one that you are already aware of. I am engaged to Mr. Heigham."

"Bah! that is nothing. I know that; but you will not throw away such a love as I have to offer for the wavering affection of a boy. We can soon get rid of him. Write and tell him that you have changed your mind. Listen, Angela," he went on, catching her by the skirt of her dress; "he is not rich, he has only got enough for a bare living. I have five times the money, and you shall help to spend it. Don't marry a young beggar like that; you won't get value for yourself. It will pay you ever so much better to marry me."

George was convinced from his experience of the sex that every woman could be bought if only you bid high enough; but, as the sequel showed, he could not well have used a worse argument to a person like Angela, or one more likely to excite the indignation that fear of him, together with a certain respect for the evident genuineness of his suffering, had hitherto kept in sup-

pression. She wrenched her dress free from him, leaving a portion of its fabric in his hand.

"Are you not ashamed?" she said, her voice trembling with indignation and her eyes filled with angry tears; "are you not ashamed to talk me like this, *you*, my own father's cousin, and yourself old enough to be my father? I tell you that my love is already given, which would have been a sufficient answer to any gentleman, and you reply by saying that you are richer than the man I love. Do you believe that a woman thinks of nothing but money? or do you suppose that I am to be bought like a beast at the market? Get up from the ground, for, since your brutality forces me to speak so plainly in my own defence, I must tell you, once and for all, that you will get nothing by kneeling to me. Listen: I would die rather than be your wife; rather than always see your face about me, I would pass my life in prison; I had sooner be touched by a snake than by you. You are quite hateful to me. Now you have your answer, and I beg that you will rise and let me pass."

Drawn up to the full height of her majestic stature, her face flushed with emotion, and her clear eyes flashing scornful fire, while in her hand she still held the bough of sweet honeysuckle; Angela formed a strange contrast to the miserable man crouched at her feet, swaying himself to and fro and moaning, his hat off and his face hidden in his trembling hands.

As he would not, or could not move, she left him there, and, slipping through a neighbouring gap, vanished from sight. When she was fairly gone, he stirred, and having risen and recovered his hat, which had fallen off in his excitement, his first action was to shake his fist in the direction in which she had vanished, his next to

frantically kiss the fragment of her dress that he still held in his hand.

"You *shall* marry me yet, my fine lady," he said between his teeth; "and, if I do not repay your gentle words with interest, my name is not George Caresfoot;" and then, staggering like a drunken man, he made his way home.

"Oh! Arthur," thought Angela, as she crept quite broken in spirit to the solitude of her room, "if I only knew where you were, I think that I would follow you, promise or no promise. There is no one to help me, no one; they are all in league against me—even my own father."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIR JOHN IS CONSULTED.

NOTWITHSTANDING his brave threats made behind Angela's back, about forcing her to marry him in the teeth of any opposition which she could offer, George reached home that night very much disheartened about the whole business. How was he to bow the neck of this proud woman to his yoke, and break the strong cord of her allegiance to her absent lover? With many girls it might have been possible to find a way, but Angela was not an ordinary girl. He had tried, and Lady Bellamy had tried, and they had both failed, and as for Philip he would take no active part in the matter. What more could be done? Only one thing that he could think of, he could force Lady Bellamy to search her finer brains for a fresh expedient. Acting upon this idea, he

at once despatched a note to her, requesting her to come and see him at Isleworth on the following morning.

That night passed very ill for the love-lorn George. Angela's vigorous and imaginative expression of her entire loathing of him had pierced even the thick hide of his self-conceit, and left him sore as a whipped hound, altogether too sore to sleep. When Lady Bellamy arrived on the following morning, she found him marching up and down the dining-room, in the worst of his bad tempers, and that was a very shocking temper indeed. His light blue eyes were angry and bloodshot, his general appearance was slovenly to the last degree, and a red spot burned upon each sallow cheek.

"Well, George, what is the matter? You don't look quite so happy as a lover should."

He grunted by way of answer.

"Has the lady been unkind, failed to appreciate your advances, eh?"

"Now look here, Anne," he answered, savagely, "if I have to put up with things from that confounded girl, I am not going to bear your jeers, so stop them once and for all."

"It is very evident that she has been unkind. Supposing that instead of abusing me you tell me the details. No doubt they are interesting," and she settled herself in a low chair, and glanced at him keenly from under her heavy eyelids.

Thus admonished, George proceeded to give her such a version of his melancholy tale as best suited him, needless to say not a full one, but his hearer's imagination easily supplied the gaps, and, as he proceeded, a slow smile crept over her face as she conjured up the suppressed details of the scene in the lane.

"Curse you! what are you laughing at? You came here to listen, not laugh," broke out George, furiously, when he saw it.

Lady Bellamy made no answer, and he continued his thrilling tale without comment on her part.

"Now," he said, when it was finished, "what is to be done?"

"There is nothing to be done; you have failed to win her affections, and there is an end to the matter."

"Then you mean that I must give it up?"

"Yes, and a very good thing too, for the ridiculous arrangement that you have entered into with Philip would have half ruined you, and you would be tired of the girl in a month."

"Now, look you here, Anne," said George, in a sort of hiss, and standing over her in a threatening attitude, "I have suspected for some time that you were playing me false in this business, and now I am sure of it. You put the girl up to treating me like this, you treacherous snake; you have struck me from behind, you Red Indian in petticoats. But, listen, I will be square with you; you shall not have all the laugh on your side."

"George, you must be mad."

"You shall see whether I am mad or not. Did you see what the brigands did to a fellow they caught in Greece the other day for whom they wanted ransom? First, they sent his ear to his friends, then his nose, then his foot, and, last of all, his head—all by post, mark you. Well, dear Anne, that is just how I am going to pay you out. You shall have a week to find a fresh plan to trap the bird you have frightened, and, if you find none, first, I shall post one of those interesting letters that I have yonder to your husband—anonymously, you

know—not a very compromising specimen, but one that will pique his curiosity and set him making inquiries; then I shall wait another week.”

Lady Bellamy could bear it no longer. She sprang up from her chair, pale with anger.

“You fiend in human form, what is it, I wonder, that has kept me so long from destroying you and myself too? Oh! you need not laugh; I have the means to do it, if I choose: I have had them for twenty years.”

George laughed again, hoarsely.

“Quite penny-dreadful, I declare. But I don’t think you will come to that; you would be afraid, and, if you do, I don’t much care—I am pretty reckless, I can tell you.”

“For your threats,” she went on, without heeding him, “I care nothing, for, as I tell you, I have their antidote at hand. You have known me for many years, tell me, did you ever see my nerve desert me? Do you suppose that I am a woman who would bear failure when I could choose death? No, George, I had rather pass into eternity on the crest of the wave of my success, such as it has been, and let it break and grind me to powder there, or else bear me to greater heights. All that should have been a woman’s better part in the world you have destroyed in me. I do not say that it was altogether your fault, for an evil destiny bound me to you, and it must seem odd to you when I say that, knowing you for what you are, I still love you. And to fill up this void, to trample those surging memories, I have made myself a slave to my ambition, and the acquisition of another power that you cannot understand. The man you married me to is rich and a knight to-day. I made him so. If I live another twenty years, his wealth shall be colossal

and his influence unbounded, and I will be one of the most powerful women in the kingdom. Why do you suppose that I fear your treachery? Do you think that I should mind its being known that I had thrown aside that poor fig-leaf, virtue—the green garment that marks a coward or a fool; for, mark you, all women, or nearly all, would be vicious if they dared. Fear and poverty of spirit restrain them, not virtue. Why, it is by their vices, properly managed, that women always have risen, and always will rise. To be really great, I think that a woman must be vicious with discrimination, and I respect vice accordingly. No, it is not that I fear. I am afraid because I have a husband whose bitter resentment is justly piling up against me from year to year, who only lies in wait for an opportunity to destroy me. Nor is he my only enemy. In his skilful hands, the letters you possess, as society is in this country, can be used so as to make me powerless. Yes, George, all the good in me is dead; the mad love I have given you is hourly outraged, and yet I cannot shake it off. *There* alone my strength fails me, and I am weak as a child. Only the power to exercise my will, my sense of command over the dullards around me, and a yet keener pleasure you do not know of, are left to me. If these are taken away, what will my life be? A void, a waste, howling wilderness, a place where I will not stay! I had rather tempt the unknown. Even in Hell there must be scope for abilities such as mine!”

She paused awhile, as if for an answer, and then went on—

“And as for you, poor creature that you are, words cannot tell how I despise you. You discard me and my devotion, to follow a nature, in its ways, it is true, greater

even than my own, representing the principle of good, as I represent the principle of evil, but one to which yours is utterly abhorrent. Can you mix light with darkness, or filthy oil with water? As well hope to merge your life, black as it is with every wickedness, with that of the splendid creature you would defile. Do you suppose that a woman such as she is will ever be really faithless to her love, even though you trap her into marriage? Fool! her heart is as far above you as the stars; and without a heart a woman is a husk that none but such miseries as yourself would own. But go on—dash yourself against a purity that, in the end, will blind and destroy you. Dree your own doom! I will find you some expedients; it is my business to obey you. You shall marry her, if you will, and taste of the judgment that shall follow. Be still, I will bear no more of your insolence to-day.”

And she swept out of the room, leaving George somewhat frightened.

When Lady Bellamy reached Rewtham House, she went straight to her husband's study. He received her with much politeness, and asked her to sit down.

“I have come to consult you on a matter of some importance,” she said.

“That is, indeed, an unusual occurrence,” answered Sir John, rubbing his hands and smiling.

“It is not my own affair: listen,” and she gave him a full, accurate, and clear account of all that had taken place with reference to George's determination to marry Angela, not omitting the most trivial detail. Sir John expressed no surprise; he was a very old bird was Sir John, one for whom every net was spread in vain, whether in or out of sight. Nothing in this world, provided that

it did not affect his own comfort or safety, could affect his bland and appreciative smile. He was never surprised. Once or twice he put a shrewd question to elucidate some point in the narrative, and that was all. When his wife had finished, he said—

“Well, Anne, you have told a very interesting and amusing little history, doubly so, if you will permit me to say it, seeing that it was told of George Caresfoot by Lady Bellamy; but it seems that your joint efforts have failed. What is it that you wish me to do?”

“I wish to ask you if you can suggest any plan that will not fail? You are very cunning in your way, and your advice may be good.”

“Let me see, young Heigham is in Madeira, is he not?”

“I am sure I do not know.”

“But I do,” and he extracted a note-book from a drawer. “Let me see, I think I have an entry somewhere here. Ah! here we are. ‘Arthur P. Heigham, Esq., passenger, per *Warwick Castle*, to Madeira, June 16.’ (Copied from passenger-list, *Western Daily News*.) His second name is Preston, is it not? Lucky I kept that. Now, the thing will be to communicate with Madeira, and see if he is still there. I can easily do that; I know a man there.”

“Have you formed any plan, then?”

“Yes,” answered Sir John, with great deliberation, “I think I see my way; but I must have time to think of it. I will speak to you about it to-morrow.”

When Lady Bellamy had gone, the little man rose, peeped round to see that nobody was within hearing, and then, rubbing his dry hands with infinite zest, said aloud, in a voice that was quite solemn in the intensity of its satisfaction—

"The Lord hath delivered mine enemies into mine hand."

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. FRASER COMES AND PIGOTT GOES.

Two days after Sir John had been taken into confidence, Philip received a visit from Lady Bellamy that caused him a good deal of discomfort. After talking to him on general subjects for awhile, she rose to go.

"By the way, Mr. Caresfoot," she said, "I really had almost forgotten the object of my visit. You may remember a conversation we had together some time ago, when I was the means of paying a debt owing to you?"

Philip nodded.

"Then you will not have forgotten that one of the articles of our little verbal convention was, that if it should be considered to the interest of all the parties concerned, your daughter's old nurse was not to remain in your house?"

"I remember."

"Well, do you know, I cannot help thinking that it must be a bad thing for Angela to have so much of the society of an ill-educated and not very refined person like Pigott. I really advise you to get rid of her."

"She has been with me for twenty years, and my daughter is devoted to her. I can't turn her off."

"It is always painful to dismiss an old servant—almost as bad as discarding an old dress; but when a dress is worn out it must be thrown away. Surely the same applies to servants."

"I don't see how I am to send her away."

"I can quite understand your feelings; but then, you

see, an agreement implies obligations on both sides, doesn't it? especially an agreement 'for value received,' as the lawyers say."

Philip winced perceptibly.

"I wish I had never had anything to do with your agreements."

"Oh! if you consider it, I don't think that you will say so. Well, that is settled. I suppose she will go pretty soon. I am glad to see you looking so well—very different from your cousin, I assure you. I don't think much of his state of health. Good-bye; remember me to Angela. By the way, I don't know if you have heard that George has met with a repulse in that direction; he does not intend to press matters any more at present; but, of course, the agreement holds all the same. Nobody knows what the morrow may bring forth."

"Where you and my amiable cousin are concerned, I shall be much surprised if it does not bring forth villany," thought Philip, as soon as he heard the front door close. "I suppose that it must be done about Pigott. Curse that woman, with her sorceress face. I wish I had never put myself into her power; the iron hand can be felt pretty plainly through her velvet glove."

Life is never altogether clouded over, and that morning Angela's horizon had been brightened by two big rays of sunshine that came to shed their cheering light on the grey monotony of her surroundings. For of late, notwithstanding its occasional spasms of fierce excitement, her life had been as monotonous as it was miserable. Always the same anxious grief, the same fears, the same longing pressing hourly round her like phantoms in the mist—no, not like phantoms, like real living things peeping at her from the dark. Sometimes, indeed, the

presentiments and intangible terrors that were gradually strengthening their hold upon her would get beyond her control, and arouse in her a restless desire for action—any action, it did not matter what—that would take her away out of these dull hours of unwholesome mental growth. It was this longing to be doing something that, fevered physically with the stifling air of the summer night, and mentally by thoughts of her absent lover and recollections of Lady Bellamy's ominous words, drove her down to the borders of the lake on the evening of George's visit to her father, and, once there, prompted her to try to forget her troubles for awhile in the exercise of an art of which she had from childhood been a mistress.

The same feeling it was, too, that led her to spend long hours of the day, and even of the night, when by rights she should have been asleep, immersed in endless mathematical studies, and in solving, or attempting to solve, almost impossible problems. She found that the strenuous effort of the brain acted as a counter-irritant to the fretting of her troubles, and though it may seem an odd thing to say, owing to the intense application they required, mathematics alone exercised a soothing effect upon her. But, as one cannot constantly enjoy sleep induced by chloral without paying for it in some shape or form, Angela's relief from her cares was obtained at no small cost to her health. When the same brain, however well developed it may be, has both to study hard and suffer much, there must be a waste of tissue somewhere. In Angela's case the outward and visible result of this state of things was to make her grow thinner, and the alternate mental effect to increasingly rarefy an intellect already too ethereal for this

work-a-day world, and to plunge its owner into fits of depression which were rendered dreadful by sudden forebodings of evil that would leap to life in the recesses of her mind, and for a moment cast a lurid glare upon its gloom, such as at night the lightning gives to the blackness which surrounds it.

It was in one of the worst of these fits, her "cloudy days" as she would call them to Pigott, that good news found her. As she was dressing, Pigott brought her a letter, which, recognising Lady Bellamy's bold handwriting, she opened in fear and trembling. It contained a short note and another letter. The note ran as follows:

"DEAR ANGELA,

"I enclose you a letter from your cousin George, which contains what I suppose you will consider good news. *For your own sake* I beg you not to send it back unopened as you did the last.

"A. B."

For a moment Angela was tempted to mistrust this inclosure, and almost came to the determination to throw it into the fire, feeling sure that a serpent lurked in the grass and that it was a cunningly disguised love-letter. But curiosity overcame her, and she opened it as gingerly as though it were infected, unfolding the sheet with the handle of her hair-brush. Its contents were destined to give her a surprise. They ran thus:

"Isleworth Hall, September 20.

"MY DEAR COUSIN,

"After what passed between us a few days ago, you will perhaps be surprised at hearing from me, but, if you

have the patience to read this short letter, its contents will not, I fear, be altogether displeasing to you. They are very simple. I write to say that I accept your verdict, and that you need fear no further advances from me. Whether I quite deserved all the bitter words you poured out upon me I leave you to judge at leisure, seeing that my only crime was that I loved you. To most women the offence would not have seemed so unpardonable. But that is as it may be. After what you said there is only one course left for a man who has any pride—and that is to withdraw. So let the past be dead between us. I shall never allude to it again. Wishing you happiness in the path of life which you have chosen,

“I remain,

“Your affectionate cousin,

“GEORGE CARESFOOT.”

It would have been difficult for any one to have received a more perfectly satisfactory letter than this was to Angela.

“Pigott,” she called out, feeling the absolute necessity of a confidant in her joy, and forgetting that that worthy soul had nothing but the most general knowledge of George’s advances, “he has given me up; just think, he is going to let me alone. I declare I feel quite fond of him.”

“And who might you be talking of, miss?”

“Why, my cousin George, of course; he is going to let me alone, I tell you.”

“Which, seeing how as he isn’t fit to touch you with a pair of tongs, is about the least as he can do, miss, and, as for letting you alone, I didn’t know as he ever proposed doing anything else. But that reminds me,

miss, though I am sure I don't know why it should, how as Mrs. Hawkins, as was put in to look after the vicarage while the Reverend Fraser was away, told me last night how as she had got a telegraft the sight of which, she said, knocked her all faint like, till she turned just as yellow as the cover, to say nothing of four-and-six portage, the which, however, she intends to recover from the Reverend—Lord, where was I?"

"I am sure I don't know, Pigott, but I suppose you were going to tell me what was in the telegram."

"Yes, miss, that's right; but my head does seem to wool up somehow so at times that I fear to lose my way."

"Well, Pigott, what was in the telegram?"

"Lord, miss, how you do hurry one, begging your pardon; only that the Reverend Fraser—not but what Mrs. Hawkins do say that it can't be true, because the words warn't in his writing nor nothing like, as she has good reason to know, seeing that——"

"Yes, but what about Mr. Fraser, Pigott? Isn't he well?"

"The telegraft didn't say, as I remembers, miss; bless me, I forget if it was to-day or to-morrow."

"Oh, Pigott," groaned Angela, "do tell me what was in the telegram."

"Why, miss, surely I told you that the thing said, though I fancy likely to be in error——"

"What?" almost shouted Angela.

"Why, that the Reverend Fraser would be home by midday train, and would like a beefsteak for lunch, not mentioning, however, anything about the onions, which is very puzzling to Mrs.——"

"Oh! I am glad; why could you not tell me before? Cousin George disposed of and Mr. Fraser coming back.

Why, things are looking quite bright again; at least they would be if only Arthur were here," and her rejoicing ended in a sigh.

As soon as she thought that he would have finished his beefsteak, with or without the onions, Angela walked down to the vicarage and broke in upon Mr. Fraser with something of her old gladsome warmth. Running up to him without waiting to be announced, she seized him by both hands.

"And so you are back at last? what a long time you have been away. Oh, I am so glad to see you."

Mr. Fraser, who, it struck her, looked older since his absence, turned first a little red and then a little pale, and said—

"Yes, Angela, here I am back again in the old shop; it is very good of you to come so soon to see me. Now, sit down and tell me all about yourself whilst I go on with my unpacking. But, bless me, my dear, what is the matter with you, you look thin, and as though you were not happy, and—where has your smile gone to, Angela?"

"Never mind me, you must tell me all about yourself first. Where have you been and what have you been doing all these long months?"

"Oh, I have been enjoying myself over half the civilised globe," he answered, with a somewhat forced laugh. "Switzerland, Italy, and Spain have all been benefited by my presence, but I got tired of it, so here I am back in my proper sphere, and delighted to again behold these dear familiar faces," and he pointed to his ample collection of classics. "But let me hear about yourself, Angela. I am tired of No. 1, I can assure you."

"Oh, mine is a long story, you will scarcely find patience to listen to it."

"Ah, I thought that there was a story from your face; then I think that I can guess what it is about. Young ladies' stories generally turn upon the same pivot," and he laughed a little softly, and sat down in a corner well out of the light. "Now, my dear, I am ready to give you my best attention."

Angela blushed very deeply and, looking studiously out of the window, began to tell her story with many hesitations.

"Well, Mr. Fraser, you must understand first of all—I mean, you know, that I must tell you that—" desperately, "that I am engaged."

"Ah!"

There was something so sharp and sudden about this exclamation that Angela turned round quickly.

"What's the matter? Have you hurt yourself?"

"Yes; but go on, Angela."

It was an awkward story to tell, especially the George complication part of it, and to any one else she felt that she would have found it almost impossible to tell it, but in Mr. Fraser she was, she knew, sure of a sympathetic listener. Had she known, also, that the mere mention of her lover's name was a stab to her listener's heart, and that every expression of her own deep and enduring love and each tone of endearment were new and ingenious tortures, she might well have been confused.

For so it was. Although he was fifty years of age, Mr. Fraser had not educated Angela with impunity. He had paid the penalty that must have resulted to any heart-whole man not absolutely a fossil, who had been brought into close contact with such a woman as Angela. Her loveliness appealed to his sense of beauty, her goodness to his heart, and her learning to his intellectual

sympathies. What wonder that he learnt by imperceptible degrees to love her; the wonder would have been if he had not.

The reader need not fear, however; he shall not be troubled with any long account of Mr. Fraser's misfortune, for it never came to light or obtruded itself upon the world or even upon its object. His was one of those earnest, secret, and self-sacrificing passions of which, if we only knew it, there exist a good many round about us, passions which to all appearance tend to nothing and are entirely without object, unless it be to make the individuals on whom they are inflicted a little less happy, or a little more miserable, as the case may be, than he or she would otherwise have been. It was to strive to conquer this passion, which in his heart he called dishonourable, that Mr. Fraser had gone abroad, right away from Angela, where he had wrestled with it, and prayed against it, and at last, as he thought, subdued it. But now, on his first sight of her, it rose again in all its former strength, and rushed through his being like a storm, and he realised that such love is of those things that cannot die. And perhaps it is a question if he really wished to lose it. It was a poor thing indeed, a very poor thing, but his own. There is something so divine about all true love that there lurks a conviction at the bottom of the hearts of most of us that it is better to love, however much we suffer, than not to love at all. Perhaps, after all, those really to be pitied are the people who are not capable of any such sensation.

But what Mr. Fraser suffered listening that autumn afternoon to Angela's tale of another's love and of her own deep return of that love, no man but himself ever knew. Yet still he heard and was not shaken in his

loyal-heartedness, and comforted and consoled her, giving her the best advice in his power, like the noble Christian gentleman that he was; showing her too that there was little need of anxiety and every ground for hope that things would come to a happy and successful issue. The martyr's abnegation of self is not yet dead in the world.

At last Angela came to the letter that she had that very morning received from George. Mr. Fraser read it carefully.

"At any rate," he said, "he is behaving like a gentleman now. On the whole, that is a nice letter. You will be troubled with him no more."

"Yes," answered Angela, and then flushing up at the memory of George's arguments in the lane, "but it is certainly time that he did, for he had no business, oh, he had no business to speak to me as he spoke, and he a man old enough to be my father."

Mr. Fraser's pale cheeks coloured a little.

"Don't be hard upon him because he is old, Angela—which by the way he is not, he is nearly ten years my junior—for I fear that old men are just as liable to be made fools of by a pretty face as young ones."

From that moment, not knowing the man's real character, Mr. Fraser secretly entertained a certain sympathy for George's sufferings, arising no doubt from a fellow-feeling. It seemed to him that he could understand a man going very far indeed when his object was to win Angela: not that he would have done it himself, but he knew the temptation and what it cost to struggle against it.

It was nearly dark when at length Angela, rising to go, warmly pressed his hand, and thanked him in her own sweet way for his goodness and kind counsel. And then, declining his offer of escort, and saying that she

would come and see him again on the morrow, she departed on her homeward path.

The first thing that met her gaze on the hall table at the Abbey House was a note addressed to herself in a handwriting that she had seen in many washing bills, but never before on an envelope. She opened it in vague alarm. It ran as follows:

"Miss,—Yore father has just dismissed me, saying that he is too pore to keep me any longer, which is a matter as I holds my own opinion on, and that I am too uneddicated to be in yore company, which is a perfect truth. But, miss, not feeling anyhow ekal to bid you good-bye in person after bringing you up by hand and doing for you these many years, I takes the liberty to write you, miss, to say good-bye and God bless you, my beautiful angel, and I shall be to be found down at the old housen at the end of the drift as my pore husband left me, which is fortinately just empty, and p'raps you will come and see me at times, miss.

"Yore obedient servant,

"PIGOTT.

"I opens this again to say how as I have tidied up your things a bit afore I left leaving mine till to-morrow, when, if living, I shall send for them. If you please, miss, you will find yore clean night-shift in the left hand drawyer, and sorry am I that I can't be there to lay it out for you. I shall take the liberty to send up for your washing, as it can't be trusted to any one."

Angela read the letter through, and then sank back upon a chair and burst into a storm of tears. Partially

recovering herself, however, she rose and entered her father's study.

"Is this true?" she asked, still sobbing.

"Is what true?" asked Philip, indifferently, and affecting not to see her distress.

"That you have sent Pigott away?"

"Yes, yes, you see, Angela——"

"Do you mean that she is really to stop away?"

"Of course I do; I really must be allowed, Angela——"

"Forgive me, father, but I do not want to listen to your reasons and excuses." Her eyes were quite dry now. "That woman nursed my dying mother, and played a mother's part to me. She is, as you know, my only woman friend, and yet you throw her away like a worn-out shoe. No doubt you have your reasons, and I hope that they are satisfactory to you, but I tell you, reasons or no reasons, you have acted in a way that is cowardly and cruel;" and casting one indignant glance at him she left the room.

Philip quailed before his daughter's anger.

"Thank goodness she's gone, and that job is done with. I am downright afraid of her, and the worst of it is she speaks the truth," said Philip to himself, as the door closed.

Ten days after this incident, Angela heard casually from Mr. Fraser that Sir John and Lady Bellamy were going on a short trip abroad for the benefit of the former's health. If she thought about the matter at all, it was to feel rather glad. Angela did not like Lady Bellamy; indeed she feared her. Of George she neither heard nor saw anything. He had also gone away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LORD MINSTER ON POLITICS.

MEANWHILE at Madeira matters were going on much as we left them; there had indeed been little appreciable change in the situation.

For his part, our friend Arthur continued to dance or rather stroll along the edge of his flowery precipice, and found the view pleasant and the air bracing.

And no doubt things were very nicely arranged for his satisfaction, and had it not been for the ever-present thought of Angela—for he did think of her a great deal and with deep longing—he should have enjoyed himself thoroughly, for every day was beautiful, and every day brought its amusements with it. Perhaps on arriving at the Quinta Carr about eleven o'clock, he would find that the steam launch was waiting for them in a little bay where the cliff on which the house stood curved inwards. Then, a merry party of young English folks all collected together by Mrs. Carr that morning by the dint of super-human efforts, they would scramble down the steps cut in the rock and steam off to some neighbouring islet to eat luncheon and wander about collecting shells and flowers and beetles till sunset, and then steam back again through the spicy evening air, laughing and flirting and making the night melodious with their songs. Or else the horses would be ordered out and they would wander over the lonely mountains in the interior of the island, talking of mummies and all things human, of Angela and all things divine. And sometimes, in the course of these conversations, Arthur would in a brotherly way call Mrs. Carr "Mildred," while occasionally, in the tone of a

spinster aunt, she would address him as "Arthur," a practice that, once acquired, she soon found, like all other bad habits, was not easy to get rid of. For somehow in all these expeditions she was continually at his side, striving, and not without success, to weave herself into the substance of his life, and to make herself indispensable to him, till at last he grew to look upon her almost as a sister.

But beyond this he never went, and to her advances he was as cold as ice, simply because he never noticed them, and she was afraid of making them more obvious for fear that she would frighten him away. He thought it the most natural thing in the world that he and Mildred should live together like brother and sister, and be very fond of each other as "sich," whilst she thought him—just what he was—the blindest of fools, and then loved him the more for his folly. The sisterly relationship did not possess the same charms for Mildred that it did for Arthur; they looked at matters from different points of view.

One morning, peeping through a big telescope that was fixed in the window of the little boudoir which formed an entrance lobby to the museum, Mrs. Carr saw a cloud of smoke upon the horizon. Presently the point of a mast poked up through the vapour as though the vessel were rising out of the ocean, then two more mast-heads and a red and black funnel, and last of all a great grey hull.

"Hurrah!" called out Mrs. Carr, with one eye still fixed to the telescope and the remainder of her little face all screwed up in her efforts to keep the other closed, "it's the mail; I can see the Donald Currie flag, a white C on a blue ground."

"Well, I am sure, Mildred, there's no need for you

to make your face like a monkey's, if it is; you look just as though the corner of your mouth were changing places with your eyebrow."

"Agatha, you are dreadfully rude; when the fairies took your endowment in hand, they certainly did not forget the gift of plain speech. I shall appeal to Mr. Heigham; do I look like a monkey, Mr. Heigham? No, on second thoughts, I won't wait for the inevitable compliment. Arthur, hold your tongue and I will tell you something. That must be the new boat, the *Garth Castle*, and I want to see over her. Captain Smithson, who is bringing her out, has got a box of things for me. What do you say if we kill two birds with one stone, go and see the vessel and get our luncheon on board?"

"I am at your ladyship's service," answered Arthur, lazily; "but would you like to have the compliment à propos of the monkey? I have thought of something extremely neat now."

"Not on my account; I hate compliments that are not meant;" and her eyes gave a little flash which put a point to her words. "Agatha, I suppose that you will come?"

"Well, yes, dear, the bay looks pretty smooth."

"Smooth, yes, you might sail across it in a paper ship," yawned Arthur.

"For goodness' sake don't look so lazy, Mr. Heigham, but ring the bell—not that one, the electric one—and let us order the launch at once. The mail will be at anchor in about an hour."

Arthur did as he was bid, and within that time they were steaming through the throng of boats which already surrounded the steamer.

"My gracious, Mildred," suddenly exclaimed Agatha, "do you see who that is there leaning over the bulwarks?"

oh, he's gone, but so sure as I'm a living woman, it was Lord Minster and Lady Florence Thingumebob, his sister, you know, the pretty one."

Mildred looked vexed, and glanced involuntarily at Arthur, who was steering the launch. For a moment she hesitated about going on, and glanced again at Arthur. The look seemed to inspire her, for she said nothing, and presently he brought the boat deftly alongside the gangway ladder.

The captain of the ship had already come to the side to meet her, having recognised her from the bridge; indeed, there was scarcely a man in Donald Currie's service who did not know Mrs. Carr, at any rate, by sight.

"How do you do, Mrs. Carr; are you coming on to South Africa with us?"

"No, Captain Smithson; I, or rather we, are coming to lunch and to see your new boat, and last, but not least, to claim my box."

"Mrs. Carr, will you ever forgive me? I have lost it!"

"Produce my box, Captain Smithson, or I will never speak to you again. I'll do more; I'll go over to the Union line."

"In which case I am afraid Donald Currie would never speak to me again. I must certainly try to find that box," and he whispered an order to a quartermaster. "Well, it is very kind of you to come and lunch, and I hope that you and your friends will do so with me. Till then, good-bye, I must be off."

As soon as they got on the quarter-deck, Arthur perceived a tall, well-preserved man with an eyeglass, whom he seemed to know, bearing down upon them, followed by a charming-looking girl, about three-and-twenty years

of age, remarkable for her pleasant eyes and the humorous expression of her mouth.

"How do you do, Mrs. Carr?" said the tall man. "I suppose that you heard that we were coming; it is very good of you to come and meet us."

"I had not the slightest idea that you were coming, and I did not come to meet you, Lord Minster; I came to lunch," answered Mrs. Carr, rather coldly.

"Nasty one for James that, very!" murmured Lady Florence; "hope it will do him good."

"I was determined to come and look you up as soon as I got time, but the House sat very late. However, I have got a fortnight here now, and I shall see plenty of you."

"A good deal too much I daresay, Lord Minster; but let me introduce you to Mr. Heigham."

Lord Minster glanced casually at Arthur, and, lifting his hat about an eighth of an inch, was about to resume his conversation, when Arthur, who was rather nettled by this treatment, said—

"I think I have had the pleasure of meeting you before, Lord Minster; we were stopping together at the Stanley Foxes last autumn."

"Stanley Foxes, ah, quite so, forgive my forgetfulness, but one meets so many people, you see," and he turned round to where Mrs. Carr had been, but that lady had taken the opportunity to retreat. Lord Minster at once followed her.

"Well, if my brother has forgotten you, Mr. Heigham, I have not," said Lady Florence, now coming forward for the first time. "Don't you remember when we went nutting together and I tumbled into the pond?"

"Indeed I do, Lady Florence, and I can't tell you

how pleased I am to see you again. Are you here for long?"

"An indefinite time: an old aunt of mine, Mrs. Velley, is coming out by next mail, and I am going to stop with her when my brother goes back. Are you staying with Mrs. Carr?"

"Oh no, only I know her very well."

"Do you admire her?"

"Immensely."

"Then you won't like James—I mean my brother."

"Why not?"

"Because he also admires her immensely."

"We both admire the view from here very much indeed, but that is no reason why you and I should not like each other."

"No, but then you see there is a difference between lovely scenery and lovely widows."

"Perhaps there is," said Arthur.

At this moment Lord Minster returned with Mrs. Carr.

"How do you do, Lady Florence?" said the latter; "let me introduce you to Mr. Heigham. What, do you already know each other?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Carr, we are old friends."

"Oh, indeed, that is very charming for you."

"Yes, it is," said Lady Florence, frankly.

"Well, we must be off now, Florence."

"All right, James, I'm ready."

"Will you both come and dine with me to-night sans façon, there will be nobody else except Agatha and Mr. Heigham?" asked Mrs. Carr.

"We shall be delighted," said Lord Minster.

"Au revoir, then," nodded Lady Florence to Arthur, and they separated.

When, after lunching and seeing round the ship, Miss Terry and Arthur found themselves in the steam launch waiting for Mrs. Carr, who was saying good-bye to the captain and looking after her precious box, Arthur took the opportunity to ask his companion what she knew of Lord Minster.

"Oh, not much; that is, nothing in particular, except that he is the son of a sugar-broker or something, who was made a peer for some reason or other, and I suppose that is why he is so stuck up, because all the other peers I ever met are just like other people. He is very clever, too, is in the Government now, and always hanging about after Mildred. He wants to marry her, you know, and I expect that he will at last, but I hope he won't. I don't like him; he always looks at one as though one were dirt."

"The deuce he does!" ejaculated Arthur, his heart filling on the instant with envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness towards Lord Minster. He had not the slightest wish to marry Mildred himself, but he boiled at the mere thought of anybody else doing so. Lady Florence was right; there is a difference between ladies and landscapes.

At that moment Mildred herself arrived, but so disgusted was he that he would scarcely speak to her, and on arriving at the landing stage he at once departed to the hotel, and even tried to get out of coming to dinner that night, but this was overruled.

"Good," said Mildred to herself, with a smile; "I have found out how to vex him."

At dinner that evening Lord Minster, who had of course taken his hostess in, opened the conversation by asking her how she had been employing herself at Madeira.

"Better than you have at St. Stephen's, Lord Minster; at any rate, I have not been forwarding schemes for highway robbery and the national disgrace," she answered, laughing.

"I suppose that you mean the Irish Land Act and the Transvaal Convention. I have heard several ladies speak of them like that, and I am really coming to the conclusion that your sex is entirely devoid of political instinct."

"What do you mean by political instinct, Lord Minster?" asked Arthur.

"By political instinct," he replied, "I understand a proper appreciation of the science and objects of government."

"Goodness me, what are they?" asked Mrs. Carr.

"Well, the science of government consists, roughly speaking, in knowing how to get into office, and remain there when once in; its objects are to guess and give expression to the prevailing popular feeling or whim with the loss of as few votes as possible."

"According to that definition," said Arthur, "all national questions are, or should be, treated by those who understand the 'science and objects of government' on a semi-financial basis. I mean, they should be dealt with as an investor deals with his funds, in order to make as much out of them as possible, not to bring real benefit to the country."

"You put the matter rather awkwardly, but I think I follow you. I will try to explain. In the first place, all the old-fashioned Jingo nonsense about patriotism and the 'honour of the country' has, if people only knew it, quite exploded; it only lingers in a certain section of the landed gentry and a proportion of the upper middle

class, and has no serious weight with leading politicians."

"How about Lord Beaconsfield?"

"Well, he was perhaps an exception, but then he was a man with so large a mind—I say it, though I detested him—that he could actually, by a sort of political prescience, see into the far future, and shape his course accordingly. But even in his case I do not believe that he was actuated by patriotism, but rather by a keener insight into human affairs than most men possess."

"And yet he came terribly to grief."

"Because he outflowed his age. The will of the country—which means the will of between five hundred thousand and a million hungry fluctuating electors—could not wait for the development of his imperial schemes. They wanted plunder in the present, not honour and prosperity for the Empire in the future. The instinct of robbery is perhaps the strongest in human nature, and those who would rule humanity on its present basis must pander to it or fail. The party of progress means the party that can give most spoil, taken from those that have, to those who have not. That is why Mr. Gladstone is such a truly great man; he understands better than any one of his age how to excite the greed of hungry voters and to guide it for his own ends. What was the Midlothian campaign but a crusade of plunder? First he excited the desire, then he promised to satisfy it. Of course that is impossible, but at the time he was believed—indeed, he believed himself, he has that great faculty—and his promises floated us into power. The same arguments apply to that body of electors whose motive power is sentiment—their folly must be pandered to. For instance, the Transvaal Convention that Mrs. Carr mentioned is an

admirable example of how such pandering is done. No man of experience can have believed that such an agreement could be wise, or that it can result in anything but trouble and humiliation; but the trouble and humiliation will not come just yet, and in the meanwhile a sop is thrown to Cerberus. Political memories are short, and when exposure comes it will be easy to fix the blame upon the other side. It is because we appreciate these facts that in the end we must prevail. The Liberal party, or rather its Radical section, which is to the great Liberal party what the helm is to the ship, appeals to the baser instincts and more pressing appetites of the people; the Conservative only to their traditions and higher aspirations, in the same way that religion appeals to the spirit, and the worship of Mammon to the senses. The shibboleth of the one is 'self-interest;' of the other, 'national honour.' The first appeals to the many, the second to the finer few, and I must leave you to judge which will carry the day."

"And if ever you become Prime Minister, shall you rule England upon these principles?" asked Mrs. Carr.

"Certainly; it is because I have mastered them that I am what I am. I owe everything to them, consequently in my view they are the finest of all principles."

"Then Heaven help England!" soliloquised Arthur, rudely.

"And so say we all," added Lady Florence, who was a strong Conservative.

"My dear young people," answered Lord Minster, with a superior smile, "England is quite capable of looking after herself. I have to look after myself. She will, at any rate, last my time, and my motto is that we should get something out of our country, not attempt to do her

services that would in all probability never be recognised, or, if recognised, be left unrewarded."

Arthur was about to answer, with more sharpness than discretion, but Mrs. Carr interposed.

"Well, Lord Minster, we have to thank you for a very cynical and lucid explanation of the objects of your party, if they really are its objects. Will you give me some wine?"

After dinner Mrs. Carr devoted herself almost exclusively to Lord Minster, leaving Arthur to talk to Lady Florence. Lord Minster was not slow to avail himself of the opportunity.

"I have been thinking of your remark to me in London about the crossing-sweeper," he began.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake don't drag that wretched man out of his grave, Lord Minster. I really have forgotten what I said about him."

"I hope, Mrs. Carr, that you have forgotten a good deal you said that day. I may as well take this opportunity——"

"No, please don't, Lord Minster," she answered, knowing very well what was coming. "I am so tired to-night."

"Oh, in that case, I can easily postpone my statement. I have a whole fortnight before me."

Mrs. Carr secretly determined that it should remain as much as possible at his own exclusive disposal, but she did not say so.

Shortly after this, Arthur took his leave, after shaking hands very coldly with Mildred. Nor did he come to the Quinta next day, as he had conceived too great a detestation of Lord Minster to risk meeting him, a detestation which he attributed solely to that rising member of the Government's political principles, which jarred very much with his own.

"Better and better," said Mrs. Carr to herself, as she took off her dress, "but Lord Minster is really odious; I cannot stand him for long."

CHAPTER XXVII.

LORD MINSTER ON LOVE.

"WHY, Arthur, I had almost forgotten what you are like," said Mildred, when that young gentleman at last put in an appearance at the Quinta. "Where have you been to all this time?"

"I—oh, I have been writing letters," said Arthur.

"Then they must have been very long ones. Don't tell fibs, Arthur; you have not stopped away from here a day and a half in order to write letters. What is the matter with you?"

"Well, if you must know, Mildred, I detest your friend Lord Minster; the mere sight of him sets my teeth on edge, and I did not want to meet him. I only came here to-day because Lady Florence told me that they were going up to the Convent this afternoon."

"So you have been to see Lady Florence?"

"No, I met her buying fruit yesterday, and went for a walk with her."

"In the intervals of the letter-writing?"

"Yes."

"Well, do you know I detest Lady Florence?"

"That is very unkind of you. She is charming."

"From your point of view, perhaps, as her brother is from mine."

"Do you mean to tell me that you think that horrid man charming?" asked Arthur, in disgust.

"Why should I not?"

"Oh, for the matter of that there is no reason why you should not, but I can't congratulate you either on your friend or your taste."

"Leaving my taste out of the question, why do you call Lord Minster my friend?"

"Because Miss Terry told me that he was; she said that he was always proposing to you, and that you would probably marry him in the end."

Mildred blushed faintly.

"She has no business to tell you; but, for the matter of that, so have many other men. It does not follow, because they choose to propose to me, that they are my friends."

"No, but then they have not married you."

"No more has he; but, while we are talking of it, why should I not marry Lord Minster? He can give me position, influence, everything that is dear to a woman, except the rarest of all gifts—love."

"But is love so rare, Mildred?"

"Yes, the love that it can satisfy a woman either to receive or to give, especially the latter, for in this we are more blessed in giving than in receiving. It is but very rarely that the most fortunate of us get a chance of accepting such love as I mean, and we can only give it once in our lives. But you have not told me your reasons against my marrying Lord Minster."

"Because he is a mean-spirited, selfish man. If he were not, he could not have talked as he did last night. Because you do not love him, Mildred; you cannot love such a man as that, if he were fifty times a member of the Government."

"What does it matter to you, Arthur," she said, in a voice of indescribable softness, bending her sunny head

low over her work, "whether I love him or not? my doing so would not make your heart beat the faster."

"I don't wish you to marry him," he said, confusedly.

She raised her head and looked full at him with eyes which shone like stars through a summer mist.

"That is enough, Arthur," she answered, in a tone of gentle submission, "if you do not wish it, I will not," and, rising, she left the room.

Arthur blushed furiously at her words, and a new sensation crept over him.

"Surely," he said to himself, "she cannot—— No, of course she only means that she will take my advice."

But, though he dismissed the suspicion thus readily, it left something that he could not quite define behind it. After the manner of young men where women are concerned, he had thought that he understood Mildred thoroughly; now he came to the modest conclusion that he knew very little about her.

On the following afternoon, when he was at the Quinta talking as usual to Mrs. Carr, he saw Lord Minster coming up the steps of the portico, dressed in much the same way and with exactly the same air as he was accustomed to assume when he mounted those of the "Reform," or occasionally, if he thought that the "hungry electors" wanted "pandering" to, those of the new "National Club."

"Hullo," said Arthur, "here comes Lord Minster in his war paint, frock-coat, tall hat, eye-glass, and all. Good-bye."

"Why do you go away, Arthur? Stop and protect me," said Mildred, laughing.

"Oh, no, indeed, I don't want to spoil sport. I would not interfere with your amusement on any account."

Mildred looked a little vexed.

"Well, you will come back to dinner?"

"That depends upon what happens."

"I told you what would happen, Arthur. Good-bye."

"Perhaps it is as well to get it over at once," thought Mildred.

In the hall Arthur met Lord Minster, and they passed with a gesture of recognition so infinitesimally small that it almost faded into the nothingness of a "cut." So far as he could condescend to notice so low a thing at all, his lordship had conceived a great dislike for Arthur.

"How do you do, Lord Minster?" said Mildred, cordially. "I hear that you went to the Convent yesterday; what did you think of the view?"

"The view, Mrs. Carr—was there a view? I did not notice it; indeed, I only went up there at all to please Florence. I don't like that sort of thing."

"If you don't like roughing it, I am afraid that you did not enjoy your voyage out."

"Well, no, I don't think I did, and there was a low fellow on board who had been ruined by the retrocession of the Transvaal, and who, hearing that I was in the Government, took every possible opportunity to tell me publicly that his wife and children were almost in a state of starvation, as though I cared about his confounded wife and children. He was positively brutal. No, certainly I did not enjoy it. However, I am rewarded by finding you here."

"I am very much flattered."

Lord Minster fixed his eye-glass firmly in his eye, planted his hands at the bottom of his trousers pockets, and, clearing his throat, placed himself in the attitude that was so familiar to the House, and began.

"Mrs. Carr, I told you, when last I had the pleasure

of seeing you, that I should take the first opportunity of renewing a conversation which I was forced to suspend in order to attend, if my memory serves me, a very important committee meeting. I was therefore surprised, indeed I may almost say hurt, when I found that you had suddenly flitted from London."

"Indeed, Lord Minster?"

"I will not, however, take up the time of this—I mean your time, by recapitulating all that I told you on that occasion; the facts are, so to speak, all upon the table, and I will merely touch upon the main heads of my case. My prospects are these: I am now a member of the Cabinet, and enjoy, owing to the unusual but calculated recklessness of my non-official public utterances, an extraordinary popularity with a large section of the country, the hungry section to which I alluded last night. It is probable that the course of the present Government is pretty nearly run, the country is sick of it, and those who put it into power have not got enough out of it. A dissolution is therefore an event of the near future; the Conservatives will come in, but they have no power of organisation, and very little political talent at their backs, above all, they are deficient in energy, probably because there is nothing that they can destroy and therefore no pickings to struggle for. In short, they are not '*capaces imperii*.' The want of these qualities and of leaders will very soon undermine their hold upon the country, always a slight one, and, assisted by a few other pushing men, I anticipate, by carefully playing into the hands of the Irish party which will really rule England in the future, being able, as one of the leaders of the Opposition, to consummate their downfall. Then will come my opportunity, and, if luck goes with me, I shall be First Lord of the

Treasury within half a dozen years. But now comes the difficulty. Though I am so popular with the country, I am, for some reason quite inexplicable to myself, rather at a—hum—a discount amongst my colleagues and that influential section of society to which they belong. Now, in order to succeed to the full extent that I have planned, it is absolutely essential that I should win the countenance of this class, and the only way that I can see of doing it is by marrying some woman charming enough to disarm dislike, beautiful enough to command admiration, rich enough to entertain profusely, and clever enough to rule England. Those desiderata are all to a striking degree united in your person, Mrs. Carr, and I have therefore much pleasure in asking you to become my wife.”

“You have, as I understand you, Lord Minster, made a very admirable statement of how desirable it is for yourself that you should marry me, but it is not so clear what advantage I should reap by marrying you.”

“Why, the advantages are obvious: if by your help I can become Prime Minister, you would become the wife of the Prime Minister.”

“The prospect fails to dazzle me. I have everything that I want; why should I strive to reach a grandeur to which I was not born, and which, to speak the truth, I regard with a very complete indifference? But there is another point. In all your speech you have said nothing of any affection that you have to offer, not a single word of love—you have been content to expatiate on the profits that a matrimonial investment would bring to yourself, and by reflection, to the other contracting party.”

“Love!” asked Lord Minster, with an expression of genuine surprise; “why, you talk like a character in a novel; now tell me, Mrs. Carr, *what* is love?”

"It is difficult to define, Lord Minster; but as you ask me to do so, I will try. Love to a woman is what the sun is to the world, it is her life, her animating principle, without which she must droop, and, if the plant be very tender, die. Except under its influence, a woman can never attain her full growth, never touch the height of her possibilities, or bloom into the plenitude of her moral beauty. A loveless marriage dwarfs our natures: a marriage where love is develops them to their utmost."

"And what is love to a man?"

"Well, I should say that nine of a man's passions are merely episodes in his career, the mile-stones that mark his path; the tenth, or the first, is his philosopher's stone that turns all things to gold, or, if the charm does not work, leaves his heart, broken and bankrupt, a cold monument of failure."

"I don't quite follow you, and I must say that, speaking for myself, I never felt anything of all this," said Lord Minster, blankly.

"I know that you do not, Lord Minster; your only passions tend towards political triumphs and personal aggrandisement; we are at the two poles, you see, and I fear that we can never, never meet upon a common matrimonial line. But don't be down-hearted about it, you will find plenty more women who fulfil all your requirements and will be very happy to take you at your own valuation. If only a woman is necessary to success, you need not look far, and forgive me if I say that I believe it will not make much difference to you who she is. But all the same, Lord Minster, I will venture to give you a piece of advice: next time you propose, address yourself a little more to the lady's affections and a little less

to her interests;" and Mrs. Carr rose as though to show that the interview was at an end.

"Am I then to understand that my offer is definitely refused?" asked Lord Minster, stiffly.

"I am afraid so, and I am sure that you will, on reflection, see how utterly unsuited we are to each other?"

"Possibly, Mrs. Carr, possibly; at present all that I see is that you have had a great opportunity, and have failed to avail yourself of it. My only consolation is that the loss will be yours, and my only regret that I have had the trouble of coming to this place for nothing. However, there is a ship due to-morrow, and I shall sail in her."

"I am sorry to have been the cause of bringing you here, Lord Minster, and still more sorry that you should feel obliged to cut short your stay. Good-bye, Lord Minster; we part friends, I hope?"

"Oh, certainly, Mrs. Carr. I wish you a very good morning, Mrs. Carr," and his lordship marched out of Mildred's life.

"There goes my chance of becoming the wife of a Prime Minister, and making a figure in history," said that lady, as she watched his tall figure stalking stiffly down the avenue. "Well, I am glad of it. I would just as soon have married a speech-making figure-head stuffed full of the purest Radical principles."

On the following day Arthur met Lady Florence again in the town.

"Where have you been to, Lady Florence?" he said.

"To see my brother off," she answered, without any signs of deep grief.

"What, has he gone already?"

"Yes; your friend Mrs. Carr has been too many for poor James."

"What! do you mean that he has been proposing?"

"Yes, and got more than he bargained for."

"Is he cut up?"

"He, no, but his vanity is. You see, Mr. Heigham, it is this way. My brother may be a very great man and a pillar of the State, and all that sort of thing. I don't say he isn't; but from personal experience I *know* that he is an awful prig, and thinks that all women are machines constructed to advance the comfort of your noble sex. Well, he has come down a peg or two, that's all, and he don't like it. Good-bye; I'm in a hurry."

Lady Florence was nothing if not outspoken.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MILDRED'S PHILOSOPHY.

A WEEK or so after the departure of Lord Minster, Mildred suggested that on the following day they should vary their amusements by going up to the Convent, a building perched on the hills some thousand feet above the town of Funchal. The order of their going was to be in palanquins, or rather hammocks swung upon long poles. Arthur, who had never yet travelled in these luxurious conveyances, jumped at the idea, and even Miss Terry, when she discovered that she was to be carried, made no objection. The party was completed by the addition of a newly married couple of whom Mrs. Carr had known something at home, and who had come to Madeira to spend the honeymoon. Lady Florence also had been asked, but, rather to Arthur's disappointment, she could not come.

When the long line of swinging hammocks were marshalled, each with its two sturdy bearers, and the adventurous voyagers had settled themselves in them, they really formed quite an imposing procession, headed as it was by the extra-sized one that carried Miss Terry, who complained bitterly that "the thing wobbled and made her feel sick."

But to Arthur's mind there was something effeminate in allowing himself, a strong, active man, to be carted up hills as steep as the side of a house by two perspiring wretches; so, hot as it was, to the intense amusement of his bearers, he elected to get out and walk. The newly married man followed his example, and for a while they went on together, till presently the latter gravitated towards his wife's palanquin, and, overcome at so long a separation, squeezed her hand between the curtains. Not wishing to intrude himself on their conjugal felicity, Arthur in his turn gravitated to the side of Mrs. Carr, who was being lightly swung along in the second palanquin some twenty yards behind Miss Terry's. Shortly afterwards they observed a signal of distress being flown by that lady, whose arm was to be seen violently agitating a green veil from between the curtains of her hammock, which immediately came to a dead stop.

"What is it?" cried Arthur and Mildred, in a breath, as they arrived on the scene of supposed disaster.

"My dear Mildred, will you be so kind as to tell that man" (pointing to her front bearer, a stout, flabby individual) "that he must not go on carrying me. I must have a cooler man. It makes me positively ill to see him puffing and blowing and dripping under my nose like a fresh basted joint."

Miss Terry's realistic description of her bearer's ap-

pearance, which was, to say the least of it, limp and moist, was no exaggeration. But then she herself, as Arthur well remembered, was no light-weight, especially when, as in the present case, she had to be carted up the side of a nearly perpendicular hill some miles long, a fact very well exemplified by the condition of the bearer.

"My dear Agatha," replied Mildred, laughing, "what is to be done? Of course the man is hot, you are not a feather-weight; but what is to be done?"

"I don't know, but I won't go on with him, it's simply disgusting; he might let himself out as a watering-cart."

"But we can't get another here."

"Then he must cool himself, the others might come and fan him. I won't go on till he is cool, and that's flat."

"He will take hours to cool, and meanwhile we are broiling on this hot road. You really must come on, Agatha."

"I have it," said Arthur. "Miss Terry must turn herself round with her head towards the back of the hammock, and then she won't see him."

To this arrangement the aggrieved lady was after some difficulty persuaded to accede, and the procession started again.

Their destination reached, they picnicked as they had arranged, and then separated, the bride and bridegroom strolling off in one direction, and Mildred and Arthur in another, whilst Miss Terry mounted guard over the plates and dishes.

Presently Arthur and Mildred came to a little English-looking grove of pine and oak, that extended down a gentle slope and was bordered by a steep bank, at the foot of which great ferns and beautiful Madeira flowers twined themselves into a shelter from the heat. Here

they sat down and gazed at the splendid and many-tinted view set in its background of emerald ocean.

"What a view it is!" said Arthur. "Look, Mildred, how dark the clumps of sugar-cane look against the green of the vines, and how pretty are the red roofs of the town peeping out of the groves of fruit-trees. Do you see the great shadow thrown upon the sea by that cliff? how deep and cool the water looks within it, and how it sparkles where the sun strikes."

"Yes, it is beautiful, and the pines smell sweet."

"I wish Angela could see it," he said, half to himself. Mildred, who was lying back lazily among the ferns, her hat off, her eyes closed, so that the long dark lashes lay upon her cheek, and her head resting on her arm, suddenly started up.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing, you woke me from a sort of dream, that's all."

"This spring I remember going with her to look at a view near the Abbey House, and saying—what I often think when I look at anything beautiful and full of life—that it depressed one to know that all this was so much food for death, and its beauty a thing that to-day is and to-morrow is not."

"And what did she say?"

"She said that to her it spoke of immortality, and that in everything around her she saw evidences of eternal life."

"She must be very fortunate. Shall I tell you of what it reminds me?"

"What?"

"Of neither death nor immortality, but of the full, happy, pulsing existence of the hour, and of the beautiful world that pessimists like yourself and mystics like your

Angela think so poorly of, but which is really so glorious and so rich in joy. Why, this sunlight and those flowers, and the wide sparkle of that sea, are each and all a happiness, and the health in our veins and the beauty in our eyes are deep pleasures that we never value till we lose them. Death, indeed, comes to us all, but why add to its terrors by thinking of them whilst it is far off? And, as for life after death, it is a faint, vague thing, more likely to be horrible than happy. This world is our only reality, the only thing that we can grasp; here alone we *know* that we can enjoy, and yet how we waste our short opportunities for enjoyment! Soon youth will have slipped away, and we shall be too old for love. Roses fade fastest, Arthur, when the sun is bright; in the evening, when they have fallen, and the ground is red with withering petals, do you not think we shall wish that we had gathered more?"

"Yours is a pleasant philosophy, Mildred," he said, struggling faintly in his own mind against her conclusions.

But, at that moment, somehow, his fingers touched her own and were presently locked fast within her little palm, and for the first time in his life they sat hand in hand. But, happily for him, he did not venture to look into her eyes, and before many minutes had passed, Miss Terry's voice was heard calling him loudly.

"I suppose that you must go," said Mildred, with a shade of vexation in her voice and a good many shades upon her face, "or she will be blundering down here. I will come, too; it is time for tea."

On arriving at the spot whence the sounds proceeded, they found Miss Terry surrounded by a crowd of laughing and excited bearers, and pouring out a flood of the most vigorous English upon an unfortunate islander, who

stood, a silver mug in each hand, bowing and shrugging his shoulders, and enunciating with every variety of movement indicative of humiliation, these domestic words:

"Mee washeeppee, signora, washeeppee—e."

"What *is* the matter now, Agatha?"

"Matter, why, I woke up and found this man stealing the cups; I charged him at once with my umbrella, but he dodged and I fell down, and the umbrella has gone over the rock there. Take him up at once, Arthur—there's the stolen property on his person. Hand him over to justice."

"Good gracious, Agatha, what are you thinking about? The poor man only wants to wash the things out."

"Then I should like to know why he could not tell me so in plain English," said Miss Terry, retiring discomfited amidst shouts of laughter from the whole party, including the supposed thief.

After tea they all set out on a grand beetle-hunting expedition, and so intent were they upon this fascinating pursuit that they did not note the flight of time, till suddenly Mildred, pulling out her watch, gave a pretty cry of alarm.

"Do you know what time it is, good people? Half-past six, and the Custances are to dine with us at a quarter-past seven. It will take us a good hour to get down; what *shall* we do?"

"I know," said Arthur, "there are two sledges just below: I saw them as we came up. They will take us down to Funchal in a quarter of an hour, and we can get to the Quinta by about seven."

"Arthur, you are invaluable; the very thing. Come on, all of you, quick."

Now these sledges are peculiar to Madeira, being

made on the principle of the bullock car, with the difference that they travel down the smooth, stone-paved roadways by their own momentum. They are guided by two skilled conductors, each with one foot naked to prevent his slipping, who hold the ropes, and when the sledge begins to travel more swiftly than they can follow, mount upon the projecting ends of the runners and are carried with it. By means of the swift and exhilarating rush of these sledges, the traveller traverses the distance, that it takes some hours to climb, in a very few minutes. Indeed, his journey up and down may be very well compared with that of the well-known British sailor who took five hours to get up Majuba mountain, but, according to his own forcibly told story, came down again with an almost incredible rapidity. It may therefore be imagined that sledge-travelling in Madeira is not very well suited to nervous voyagers.

Miss Terry had at times seen these wheelless vehicles shoot from the top of a mountain to the bottom like a balloon with the gas out, and had also heard of occasional accidents in connection with them. Stoutly she vowed that nothing should induce her to trust her neck to one of them.

"But you must, Agatha, or else be left behind. They are as safe as a church, and I can't leave the Custances to wait till half-past eight for dinner. Come, get in. Arthur can go in front and hold you; I will sit behind."

Thus admonished—Miss Terry entered groaning, Arthur taking his seat beside her, and Mrs. Carr hers in a sort of dickey behind. The newly married pair, who did not half like it, possessed themselves of the smaller sledge, determined to brave extinction in each other's arms. Then the conductors seized the ropes, and, plant-

ing their one naked foot firmly before them, awaited the signal to depart.

"Stop," said Miss Terry, lifting the recovered umbrella, "that man has forgotten to put on his shoe and stocking on his right leg. He will cut his foot, and besides, it doesn't look respectable to be seen flying through a place with a one-legged ragamuffin——"

"Let her go," shouted Arthur, and they did, to some purpose, for in a minute they were passing down that hill like a flash of light. Woods and houses appeared and vanished like the visions of a dream, and the soft air went singing away on either side of them as they clove it, flying downwards at an angle of thirty degrees, and leaving nothing behind them but the sound of Miss Terry's lamentations. Soon they neared the bottom, but there was yet a dip—the deepest of them all, with a sharp turn at the end of it—to be traversed.

Away went the little connubial sledge in front like a pigeon down the wind; away they sped after it like an eagle in pursuit; *crack* went the little sledge into the corner, and out shot the happy pair; *crash* went the big sledge into it, and Arthur became conscious of a wild yell, of a green veil fluttering through the air, and of a fall as on to a feather-bed. Miss Terry's superior weight had brought her to mother earth the first, and he, after a higher heavenward flight, had lit upon the top of her. He picked her up and sat her down against a wall to recover her breath, and then fished Mildred, dirty and bruised, but as usual laughing, out of a gutter; the loving pair had already risen and in an agony of mutual anxiety were rubbing each other's shins. And then he started back with a cry, for there before him, surveying the dis-

aster with an air of mingled amusement and benevolence, stood—Sir John and Lady Bellamy.

Had it been the Prince and Princess of Evil—if, as seems probable, there is a Princess—Arthur could scarcely have been more astounded. Somehow he had always in his thoughts regarded Sir John and Lady Bellamy, when he thought about them at all, as possessing indeed individual characters and tendencies, but as completely “*adscripti glebæ*” of the neighbourhood of the Abbey House as that house itself. He would as soon have expected to see Caresfoot’s Staff re-rooted in the soil of Madeira, as to find them strolling about Funchal. He rubbed his eyes; perhaps, he thought, he had been knocked silly and was labouring under a hallucination. No, there was no doubt about it; there they were, just the same as he had seen them at Isleworth, except that if possible Sir John looked even more like a ripe apple than usual, while the sun had browned his wife’s Egyptian face and given her a last finish as a perfect type of Cleopatra. Nor was the recognition on his side only, for next second his hand was grasped first by Sir John and then by Lady Bellamy.

“When we last met, Mr. Heigham,” said the gentleman, with a benevolent beam, “I think I expressed a wish that we might soon renew our acquaintance, but I little thought under what circumstances our next meeting would take place,” and he pointed to the overturned sledges and the prostrate sledgers.

“You have had a very merciful escape,” chimed in Lady Bellamy, cordially; “with so many hard stones about, affairs might have ended differently.”

“Now then, Mr. Heigham, we had better set to and run, that is, if Agatha has got a run left in her, or we

shall be late after all. Thank goodness nobody is hurt; but we must find a hammock for Agatha, for to judge from her groans she thinks she is. Is my nose—— Oh, I beg your pardon,” and Mrs. Carr stopped short, observing for the first time that he was talking to strangers.

“Do not let me detain you, if you are in a hurry. I am so thankful that nobody is hurt,” said Lady Bellamy. “I believe that we are stopping at the same hotel, Mr. Heigham, I saw your name in the book, so we shall have plenty of opportunities of meeting.”

But Arthur felt that there was one question which he must ask before he went on, whether or not it exceeded the strict letter of his agreement with Philip; so, calling to Mrs. Carr that he was coming, he said, with a blush—

“How was Miss Caresfoot when—when last you saw her, Lady Bellamy?”

“Perfectly well,” she answered, smiling.

“And more lovely than ever,” added her husband.

“Thank you for that news; it is the best I have heard for some time. Good-bye for the present; we shall meet to-morrow at breakfast,” and he ran on after the others, happier than he had been for months, feeling that he had come again within call of Angela, and as though he had never set hand in hand with Mildred Carr.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BELLAMYS ABROAD.

AT breakfast on the following morning Arthur, as he had anticipated, met the Bellamys. Sir John came down first, arrayed in true English fashion, in a tourist suit of grey, and presently Lady Bellamy followed. As she entered, dressed in trailing white, and walked slowly up

the long table, every eye was turned upon her, for she was one of those women who attract attention as surely and unconsciously as a magnet attracts iron. Arthur, looking with the rest, thought that he had never seen a stranger, or at the same time a more imposing-looking, woman. Time had not yet touched her beauty or impaired her vigorous constitution, and at forty she was still at the zenith of her charms. The dark hair, that threw out glinting lights of copper when the sun struck it, still curled in its clustering ringlets and showed no line of grey, while the mysterious, heavy-lidded eyes and the coral lips were as full of rich life and beauty as they had been when she and Hilda von Holtzhausen first met at Rewtham House.

On her face, too, was the same expression of quiet power, of conscious superiority and calm command, that had always distinguished it. Arthur tried to think what it reminded him of, and remembered that the same look was to be seen upon the stone features of some of the Egyptian statues in Mildred's museum.

"How splendid Lady Bellamy looks!" he said, almost unconsciously, to his neighbour.

Sir John did not answer; and Arthur, glancing up to learn the reason, saw that he also was watching the approach of his wife, and that his face was contorted with a sudden spasm of intense malice and hatred, whilst his little, pig-like eyes glittered threateningly. He had not even heard the remark. Arthur would have liked to whistle; he had surprised a secret.

"How do you do, Mr. Heigham? I hope that you are not bruised after your tumble yesterday. Good morning, John."

Arthur rose and shook hands.

"I never was more surprised in my life," he said, "than when I saw you and Sir John at the top of the street there. May I ask what brought you to Madeira?"

"Health, sir, health," answered the little man. "Cough, catarrh, influenza, and all that's damn—ah! infernal!"

"My husband, Mr. Heigham," struck in Lady Bellamy, in her full, rich tones, "had a severe threatening of chest disease, and the doctor recommended a trip to some warmer climate. Unfortunately, however, his business arrangements will not permit of a long stay. We only stop here three weeks at most."

"I am sorry to hear that you are not well, Sir John."

"Oh! it is nothing very much," answered Lady Bellamy for him, "only he requires care. What a lovely garden this is—is it not? By the way, I forgot to inquire after the ladies who shared your tumble. I hope that they were none the worse. I was much struck with one of them, the very pretty person with the brown hair, whom you pulled out of the gutter."

"Oh, Mrs. Carr. Yes, she is pretty."

After breakfast, Arthur volunteered to take Lady Bellamy round the garden, with the ulterior object of extracting some more information about Angela. It must be remembered that he had no cause to mistrust that lady, nor had he any knowledge of the events which had recently happened in the neighbourhood of the Abbey House. He was therefore perfectly frank with her.

"I suppose that you have heard of my engagement, Lady Bellamy?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Heigham; it is quite a subject of conversation in the Roxham neighbourhood. Angela Caresfoot is a sweet and very beautiful girl, and I congratulate you much."

"You know, then, of its conditions?"

"Yes, I heard of them, and thought them ridiculous. Indeed I tried, at Angela's suggestion, to do you a good turn with Philip Caresfoot, and get him to modify them: but he would not. He is a curious man, Philip, and, when he once gets a thing into his head, it is beyond the power of most people to drive it out again. I suppose that you are spending your year of probation here?"

"Well, yes—I am trying to get through the time in that way; but it is slow work."

"I thought you seemed pretty happy yesterday," she answered, smiling.

Arthur blushed.

"Oh, yes, I may appear to be. But tell me all about Angela."

"I have really very little to tell. She seems to be living as usual, and looks well. Her friend Mr. Fraser has come back. But I must be going in; I have promised to go out walking with Sir John. *Au revoir*, Mr. Heigham."

Left to himself, Arthur remembered that he also had an appointment to keep—namely, to meet Mildred by the Cathedral steps, and go with her to choose some Madeira jewellery, an undertaking which she did not feel competent to carry out without his assistance.

When he reached the Cathedral, he found her rather cross at having been kept waiting for ten minutes.

"It is very rude of you," she said; "but I suppose that you were so taken up with the conversation of your friends that you forgot the time. By the way, who are they? anybody you have told me about?"

In the pauses of selecting the jewellery, Arthur told her all he knew about the Bellamys, and of their con-

nection with the neighbourhood of the Abbey House. The story caused Mildred to open her brown eyes and look thoughtful. Just as they came out of the shop, whom should they run into but the Bellamys themselves, chaffering for Madeira work with a woman in the street. Arthur stopped and spoke to them, and then introduced Mrs. Carr, who, after a little conversation, asked them up to lunch.

After this Lady Bellamy and Mildred met a good deal. The two women interested each other.

One night, when the Bellamys had been about ten days in Madeira, the conversation took a personal turn. Sir John and Arthur were sitting over their wine (they were dining with Mrs. Carr), Agatha Terry was fast asleep on a sofa, so that Lady Bellamy and Mildred, seated upon lounging-chairs by a table with a light on it, placed by an open window, were practically alone.

"Oh, by the way, Lady Bellamy," said Mildred, after a pause, "I believe that you are acquainted with the young lady to whom Mr. Heigham is engaged?" She had meant to say, "to be married," but the words stuck in her throat.

"Oh, yes, I know her well."

"I am so glad. I am quite curious to hear what she is like; one can never put much faith in lovers' raptures, you know."

"Do you mean in person or in character?"

"Both."

"Well, Angela Caresfoot is as lovely a woman as ever I saw, with a noble figure, well-set head, and magnificent eyes and hair."

Mildred turned a little pale and bit her lips.

"As to her character, I can hardly describe it. She

lives in an atmosphere of her own, an atmosphere that I cannot reach, or, at any rate, cannot breathe. But if you can imagine a woman whose mind is enriched with learning as profound as that of the first classical scholars of the day, and tinged with an originality all her own; a woman whose faith is as steady as that star, and whose love is deep as the sea and as definite as its tides; who lives to higher ends than those we strive for; whose whole life, indeed, gives one the idea that it is the shadow—imperfect, perhaps, but still the shadow—of an immortal light; then you will get some idea of Angela Caresfoot. She is a woman intellectually, physically, and spiritually immeasurably above the man on whom she has set her affections.”

“That cannot be,” said Mildred, softly, “like draws to like; she must have found something in him, some better part, some affinity of which you know nothing.”

After this she fell into silence. Presently Lady Bellamy raised her eyes, just now filled up with the great pupils, and fixed them on Mildred.

“You are thinking,” she said, slowly, “that Angela Caresfoot is a formidable rival.”

Mildred started.

“How can you pretend to read my thoughts?”

She laughed a little.

“I am an adept at the art. Don’t be down-hearted. I should not be surprised if, after all, the engagement between Mr. Heigham and Angela Caresfoot should come to nothing. Of course, I speak in perfect confidence.”

“Of course.”

“Well, the marriage is not altogether agreeable to the father, who would prefer another and more suitable match.

But, unfortunately, there is no way of shaking the young lady's determination."

"Indeed."

"But I think that, with assistance, a way might be found."

Their eyes met, and this time Mildred took up the parable.

"Should I be wrong, Lady Bellamy, if I supposed that you have not come to Madeira solely for pleasure?"

"A wise person always tries to combine business and pleasure."

"And in this case the business combined is in connection with Mr. Heigham's engagement?"

"Exactly."

"And supposing I were to tell him this?"

"Had I not known that you would on no account tell Mr. Heigham, I should not have told you."

"And how do you know that?"

"I will answer your question by another. Did you ever yet know a woman, who loved a man, willingly help him to the arms of a rival—unless indeed she was forced to it?" she added, with something like a sigh.

Mildred Carr's snowy bosom heaved tumultuously, and the rose-leaf hue faded from her cheeks.

"You mean that I am in love with Arthur Heigham. On what do you base that belief?"

"On a base as broad as the pyramids of which you were talking at dinner. Public report, not nearly so misleading a guide as people think, your face, your voice, your eyes, all betray you. Why do you always try to get near him to touch him?—answer me that. I have seen you do it three times this evening. Once you handed him a book in order to touch his hand beneath it; but

there is no need to enumerate what you doubtless very well remember. No nice woman, Mrs. Carr, ever likes to continually touch a man unless she loves him. You are always listening for his voice and step; you are listening for them now. Your eyes follow his face as a dog does his master's—when you speak to him, your voice is a caress in itself. Shall I go on?"

"I think that it is unnecessary. Whether you be right or not, I will give you the credit of being a close observer."

"To observe with me is at once a task and an amusement, and the habit is one that leads me to accurate conclusions, as I think you will admit. The conclusion I have come to in your case is that you do not wish to see Arthur Heigham married to another woman. I spoke just now of assistance——"

"I have none to give; I will give none. How could I look him in the face?"

"You are strangely scrupulous for a woman in your position."

"I have always tried to behave like an honourable woman, Lady Bellamy, and I do not feel inclined to do otherwise now."

"Perhaps you will think differently when it comes to the point. But in the meanwhile remember, that people who will not help themselves, cannot expect to be helped."

"Once and for all, Lady Bellamy, understand me. I fight for my own hand with the weapons which Nature and fortune have given me, and by myself I will stand or fall. I will join in no schemes to separate Arthur from this woman. If I cannot win him for myself by myself, I will at any rate lose him fairly. I will respect what you have told me, but I will do no more."

Lady Bellamy smiled as she answered—

“I really admire your courage. It is quite quixotic. Hush! here come the gentlemen.”

CHAPTER XXX.

BEFOOLED!

A FEW days after the dinner at the Quinta Carr, the Bellamys' visit to Madeira drew to a close. On the evening before their departure, Arthur volunteered to take Lady Bellamy down to the parade to hear the band play. After they had walked about a while under the shade of the magnolia-trees, which were starred all over with creamy cups of bloom, and sufficiently inspected the gay throng of Portuguese inhabitants and English visitors, made gayer still by the amazingly gorgeous uniforms of the officials, Arthur spied two chairs in a comparatively quiet corner, and suggested that they should sit down.

“Lady Bellamy,” he said, after hesitating a while, “you are a woman of the world, and I believe a friend of my own. I want to ask your advice about something.”

“It is entirely at your service, Mr. Heigham.”

“Well, really, it is very awkward——”

“Shall I turn my head so as not to see your blushes?”

“Don't laugh at me, Lady Bellamy. Of course you will say nothing of this.”

“If you doubt my discretion, Mr. Heigham, do not choose me as a confidante. You are going, unless I am mistaken, to speak to me about Mrs. Carr.”

“Yes, it is about her. But how did you know that? You always seem to be able to read one's thoughts before one speaks. Do you know, sometimes I think that she

has taken a fancy to me, do you see, and I wanted to ask what you thought about it."

"Well, supposing that she had, most young men, Mr. Heigham, would not talk of such a thing in a tone befitting a great catastrophe. But, if I am not entering too deeply into particulars, what makes you think so?"

"Well, really, I don't exactly know. She sometimes gives me a general idea."

"Oh, then, there has been nothing tangible."

"Well, yes, once she took my hand, or I took hers, I don't know which; but I don't think much of that, because it's the sort of thing that's always happening, don't you know, and nine times out of ten means nothing at all. But why I ask you about it is that, if there is anything of the sort, I had better cut and run out of this, because it would not be fair to stop, either to her, or to Angela, or myself. It would be dangerous, you see, playing with such a woman as Mildred Carr."

"So you would go away if you thought that she took any warmer interest in you than ladies generally do in men engaged to be married."

"Certainly I should."

"Well, then, I think that I can set your mind at ease. I have observed Mrs. Carr pretty closely, and in the way you suppose she cares for you no more than she does for your coat. She is, no doubt, a bit of a flirt, and very likely wishes to get you to fall in love with her—a natural ambition on the part of a woman; but, as for being in love with you herself, the idea is absurd. Women of the world do not fall in love so readily; they are too much taken up with thinking about themselves to have time to think about anybody else. With them it is all self, self, self, from morning till night. Besides, look at the com-

mon-sense side of the thing. Do you suppose it likely that a person of Mrs. Carr's wealth and beauty, who has only to lift her hand to have all London at her feet, is likely to fix her affections upon a young man whom she knows is already engaged to be married, and who—forgive me if I say so—has not got the same recommendations to her favour that many of her suitors have? It is, of course, quite possible that Mrs. Carr's society may be dangerous for you, in which case it might be wise for you to go; but I really do not think that you need feel any anxiety on her account. She finds you a charming companion, and in some ways a useful one, and that is all. When you go, somebody else will soon fill the vacant space."

"Then that's all right," said Arthur, though somehow he did not feel as wildly delighted as he should have done at hearing it so clearly demonstrated that Mildred did not care a brass button about him; but then that is human nature. Between eighteen and thirty-five, ninety per cent. of the men in the world would like to centre in themselves the affections of every young and pretty woman they know, even if there was not the ghost of a chance of their marrying one of them. The same tendency is to be observed conversely in the other sex, only in their case with a still smaller proportion of exceptions.

"By the way," asked Arthur, presently, "how is my late guardian, Mr. George Caresfoot?"

"Not at all well, I am sorry to say. I am very anxious about his health. He is in the south of England now for a change."

"I am sorry he is ill. Do you know, I daresay you will think me absurd; but you have taken a weight off

my mind. I always had an idea that he wanted to marry Angela, and sometimes I am afraid that I have suspected that Philip Caresfoot carted me off in order to give him a chance. You see, Philip is uncommonly fond of money, and George is rich."

"What an absurd idea, Mr. Heigham! Why, George looks upon matrimony as an institution of the evil one. He admires Angela, I know—he always does admire a pretty face; but as for dreaming of marrying a girl half his age, and his own cousin into the bargain, it is about the last thing that he would do."

"I am glad to hear it. I am sure I have been uncomfortable enough thinking about him sometimes. Lady Bellamy, will you do something for me?"

"What is that, Mr. Heigham?"

"Tell Angela all about me."

"But would that be quite honourable, Mr. Heigham—under the conditions of your engagement, I mean?"

"You never promised not to talk about me; I only promised not to attempt verbal or written communication with Angela."

"Well, I will tell her that I met you, and that you are well, and, if Philip will allow me, I will tell her more; but of course I don't know if he will or not. What ring is that you wear?"

"It is one that Angela gave me when we became engaged. It was her mother's."

"Will you let me look at it?"

Arthur held out his hand. The ring was an antique, a large emerald, cut like a seal and heavily set in a band of dull gold. On the face of the stone were engraved some mysterious characters.

"What is that engraved on the stone?"

"I am not sure; but Angela told me that Mr. Fraser had taken an impression of it, and forwarded it to a great Oriental scholar. His friend said that the stone must be extremely ancient, as the character is a form of Sanscrit, and that he believed the word to mean 'For ever' or 'Eternity.' Angela said that it had been in her mother's family for generations, and was supposed to have been brought from the East about the year 1700. That is all I know about it."

"The motto is better suited to a wedding-ring than to an engagement stone," said Lady Bellamy, with one of her dark smiles.

"Why?"

"Because engagements are like promises and pie-crust, made to be broken."

"I hope that will not be the case with ours, however," said Arthur, attempting a laugh.

"I hope not, I am sure; but never pin your faith absolutely to any woman, or you will regret it. Always accept her oaths and protestations as you would a political statement, politely, and with an appearance of perfect faith, but with a certain grain of mistrust. Woman's fidelity is in the main a fiction. We are faithful just as men are, so long as it suits us to be so; with this difference however, men play false from passion or impulse, women from calculation."

"You do not draw a pleasing picture of your own sex."

"When is the truth pleasing? It is only when we clothe its nakedness with the rags of imagination, or sweeten it with fiction, that it can please. Of itself, it is so ugly a thing that society in its refinement will not even hear it, but prefers to employ a corresponding

formula. Thus all passion, however vile, is called by the name of 'love,' all superstitious terror and grovelling attempts to conciliate the unseen are known as 'religion,' while selfish greed and the hungry lust for power masquerade as laudable 'ambition.' Men and women, especially women, hate the truth, because, like the electric light, it shows them as they are, and that is vile. It has grown so strange to them from disuse that, like Pilate, they do not even know what it is! I was going to say, however, that if you care to trust me with it, I think I see how I can take a message to Angela for you—without either causing you to break your promise or doing anything dishonourable myself."

"How?"

"Well, if you like, I will take her that ring. I think that it is a very generous offer on my part, for I do not like the responsibility."

"But what is the use of taking her the ring?"

"It is something that there can be no mistake about, that is all, a speaking message from yourself. But don't give it me if you do not like; perhaps you had rather not!"

"I don't like parting with it at all, I confess, but I should dearly like to send her something. I suppose that you would not take a letter?"

"You would not write one, Mr. Heigham!"

"No, of course, I forgot that accursed promise. Here, take the ring, and say all you can to Angela with it. You promise that you will?"

"Certainly, I promise that I will say all I can."

"You are very good and kind. I wish to Heaven that I were going to Marlshire with you. If you only knew how I long to see her again. I think that it would

break my heart if anything happened to separate us," and his lips quivered at the thought.

Lady Bellamy turned her sombre face upon him—there was compassion in her eyes.

"If you bear Angela Caresfoot so great a love, be guided by me and shake it off, strangle it—be rid of it anyhow; for fulfilled affection of that nature would carry a larger happiness with it than is allowed in a world planned expressly to secure the greatest misery of the greatest number. There is a fate which fights against it; its ministers are human folly and passion. You have seen many marriages, tell me, how many have you known, out of a novel, where the people married their true lovers? In novels they always do; it is another of society's pleasant fictions, but real life is like a novel without the third volume. I do not want to alarm you, Mr. Heigham; but, because I like you, I ask you to steel your mind to disappointments, so that, if a blow comes, it may not crush you."

"What do you mean, Lady Bellamy, do you know of any impending trouble?"

"I? Certainly not. I only talk on general principles. Do not be over-confident, and *never* trust a woman. Come, let us get home."

Next morning, when Arthur came down to breakfast, the Bellamys had sailed. The mail had come in from the Cape at midnight, and left again at dawn, taking them with it.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BALL.

THE departure of the Bellamys left Arthur in very low spirits. His sensations were similar to those which one can well imagine an ancient Greek might have experienced who, having sent to consult the Delphic oracle, had got for his pains a very unsatisfactory reply, foreshadowing evils but not actually defining them. Lady Bellamy was in some way connected with the idea of an oracle in his mind. She looked oracular. Her dark face and inscrutable eyes, the stamp of power upon her brow, all suggested that she was a mistress of the black arts. Her words, too, were mysterious, and fraught with bitter wisdom and a deep knowledge distilled from the poisonous weeds of life.

Arthur felt with something like a shudder that, if Lady Bellamy prophesied evil, evil was following hard upon her words. And in warning him not to place his whole heart's happiness upon one venture, lest it should meet with shipwreck, he was sure that she was prophesying with a knowledge of the future denied to ordinary mortals. How earnestly, too, she had cautioned him against putting absolute faith in Angela—so earnestly, indeed, that her talk had left a flavour of distrust in his mind. Yet how could he mistrust Angela?

Nor was he comforted by a remark that fell from Mildred Carr the afternoon following the departure of the mail. Raising her eyes, she glanced at his hand.

"What are you looking at?" he said.

"Was not that queer emerald you wore your engagement ring?"

"Yes."

"What have you done with it?"

"I gave it to Lady Bellamy to give to Angela."

"What for?"

"To show her that I am alive and well. I may not write, you know."

"You are very confiding."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. At least, I mean that I don't think that I should care to hand over my engagement ring so easily. It might be misapplied, you know."

This view of the matter helped to fill up the cup of Arthur's nervous anxiety, and he vainly plied Mildred with questions to get her to elucidate her meaning, and state her causes of suspicion, if she had any. But she would say nothing more on the subject, which then dropped, and was not alluded to again between them.

After the Bellamy's departure, the time wore on at Madeira without bringing about any appreciable change in the situation. But Mildred saw that their visit had robbed her of any advantages she had gained over Arthur, for they had, as it were, brought Angela's atmosphere with them, and, faint though it was, it sufficed to overpower her influence. He made no move forward, and seemed to have entirely forgotten the episode on the hills when he had gone so very near disaster. On the contrary, he appeared to her to grow increasingly pre-occupied as time went on, and to look upon her more and more in the light of a sister, till at length her patience wore thin.

As for her passion, it grew almost unrestrainable in its confinement. Now she drifted like a rudderless vessel on a sea which raged continuously, and knew no space

of calm. And so little oil was poured upon the troubled waters; there were so few breaks in the storm-walls that rose black between her and the desired haven of her rest. Indeed, she began to doubt if even her poor power of charming him, as at first she had been able to do, with the sparkle of her wit and the half-unconscious display of her natural grace, was not on the wane, and if she was not near to losing her precarious foothold in his esteem and affection. The thought that he might be tiring of her struck her like freezing wind, and for a moment turned her heart to ice.

Poor Mildred! higher than ever above her head bloomed that "blue rose" she longed to pluck. Would she ever reach it, after all her striving, even to gather one poor leaf, one withered petal? The path which led to it was very hard to climb, and below the breakers boiled. Would it, after all, be her fate to fall, down into that gulf of which the sorrowful waters could bring neither death nor forgetfulness?

And so Christmas came and went.

One day, when they were all sitting in the drawing-room, some eight weeks after the Bellamys had left, and Mildred was letting her mind run on such thoughts as these, Arthur, who had been reading a novel, got up and opened the folding-doors at the end of the room which separated it from the second drawing-room, and also the further doors between that room and the dining-room. Then he returned, and, standing at the top of the big drawing-room, took a bird's-eye view of the whole suite.

"What *are* you doing, Arthur?"

"I am reflecting, Mildred, that, with such a suite of apartments at your command, it is a sin and a shame not to give a ball."

"I will give a ball, if you like, Arthur. Will you dance with me if I do?"

"How many times?" he said, laughing.

"Well, I will be moderate—three times. Let me see—the first waltz, the waltz before supper, and the last galop."

"You will dance me off my head. It is dangerous to waltz with any one so pretty," he said, in that bantering tone he often took with her, and which aggravated her intensely.

"It is more likely that my own head will suffer, as I dance so rarely. Then, that is a bargain?"

"Certainly."

"Dear me, Mildred, how silly you are; you are like a schoolgirl!" said Miss Terry.

"Agatha is put out because you do not offer to dance three times with her."

"Oh! but I will, though, if she likes; three quadrilles."

And so the matter passed off in mutual badinage; but Mildred did not forget her intention. On the contrary, "society" at Madeira was soon profoundly agitated by the intelligence that the lady Croesus, Mrs. Carr, was about to give a magnificent ball, and so ill-natured—or, rather, so given to jumping to conclusions—is society, that it was freely said it was in order to celebrate her engagement to Arthur Heigham. Arthur heard nothing of this; one is always the last to hear things about oneself. Mildred knew of it, however, but, whether from indifference or from some hidden motive, she neither took any steps to contradict it herself, nor would she allow Miss Terry to do so.

"Nonsense," she said; "let them talk. To contradict such things only makes people believe them the more."

Mind now, Agatha, not a word of this to Mr. Heigham; it would put him out."

"Well, Mildred, I should have thought that you would be put out too."

"I!—oh, no! Worse things might happen," and she shrugged her shoulders.

At length the much expected evening came, and the arriving guests found that the ball had been planned on a scale such as Madeira had never before beheld. The night was lovely and sufficiently still to admit of the illumination of the gardens by means of Chinese lanterns that glowed all around in hundreds, and were even hung like golden fruit amongst the topmost leaves of the lofty cabbage plants, and from the tallest sprays of the bamboos. Within, the scene was equally beautiful. The suite of three reception rooms had been thrown into one, two for dancing, and one for use as a sitting-room. They were quite full, for the Madeira season was at its height, and all the English visitors who were "anybody" were there. There happened, too, to be a man-of-war in the harbour, every man-jack, or, rather, every officer-jack of which, with the exception of those on watch—and they were to be relieved later on—was there, and prepared to enjoy himself with a gusto characteristic of the British sailor-man.

The rooms, too, were by no means devoid of beauty, but by far the loveliest woman in them was Mrs. Carr herself. She was simply dressed in a perfectly-fitting black satin gown, looped up with diamond stars that showed off the exquisite fairness of her skin to great perfection. Her ornaments were also diamonds, but such diamonds—not little flowers and birds constructed of tiny stones, but large single gems, each the size of a hazel-nut;

On her head she wore a tiara of these, eleven stones in all, five on each side, and surmounted over the centre of the forehead by an enormous gem as large as a small walnut, which, standing by itself above the level of the others, flashed and blazed like a fairy star. Around her neck, wrists, and waist were similar points of concentrated light, that, shining against the black satin as she moved, gave her a truly magnificent appearance. Never before had Mildred Carr looked so perfectly lovely, for her face and form were well worthy of the gems and dress; indeed, most of the men there that night thought her eyes as beautiful as her diamonds.

The ball opened with a quadrille, but in this Mrs. Carr did not dance, being employed in the reception of her guests. Then followed a waltz, and, as its first strains struck up, several applicants came to compete for the honour of her hand; but she declined them all, saying that she was already engaged; and presently Arthur, looking very tall and quite the typical young Englishman in his dress-clothes, came hurrying up.

"You are late, Mr. Heigham," she said; "the music has begun."

"Yes; I am awfully sorry. I was dancing with Lady Florence, and could not find her old aunt."

"Indeed, to me Mrs. Velley is pretty conspicuous, with that green thing on her head; but come along, we are wasting time."

Putting his arm round her waist, they sailed away together amidst the murmurs of the disappointed applicants.

"Lucky dog!" said one.

"Infernal puppy!" muttered another.

Arthur enjoyed his waltz very much, for the rooms, though full, were not crowded, and Mildred waltzed

well. Still he was a little uneasy, for he felt in being chosen to dance the first waltz with the giver of this splendid entertainment over the heads of so many of his superiors in rank and position, that he was being put rather out of his place. He did not as a rule take any degree of notice of Mildred's appearance, but to-night it struck him as unusually charming.

"You look very beautiful to-night, Mildred," he said, when they halted for breath; "and what splendid diamonds you have on!"

She flushed with pleasure at his compliment.

"You must not laugh at my diamonds. I know that I am too insignificant to wear such jewels. I had two minds about putting them on."

"Laugh at them, indeed. I should as soon think of laughing at the Bank of England. They are splendid."

"Yes," she said, bitterly; "they would be splendid on your Angela. They want a splendid woman to carry them off."

Oddly enough, he was thinking the same thing; so, having nothing to say, he went on dancing. Presently the waltz came to an end, and Mildred was obliged to hurry off to receive the Portuguese Governor, who had just put in an appearance. Arthur looked at his card, and found that he was down for the next galop with Lady Florence Claverley.

"Our dance again, Lady Florence."

"Really, Mr. Heigham, this is quite shocking. If everybody did not know that you belonged body and soul to the lovely widow, I should be accused of flirting with you."

"Who was it made me promise to dance five dances?"

"I did. I want to make Mrs. Carr angry."

"Why should my dancing five or fifty dances with you make Mrs. Carr angry?"

Lady Florence shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"Are you blind?" she said.

Arthur felt uncomfortable.

In due course, however, the last waltz before supper came round, and he, as agreed upon, danced it with his hostess. As the strains of the music died away, the doors of the supper-room and tent were thrown open.

"Now, Arthur," said Mildred, "take me in to supper."

He hesitated.

"The Portuguese Governor——" he began.

She stamped her little foot, and her eyes gave an ominous flash.

"Must I ask you twice?" she said.

Then he yielded, though the fact of being for the second time that night placed in an unnecessarily prominent position made him feel more uncomfortable than ever, for they were seated at the head of the top table. Mildred Carr was in the exact centre, with himself on her right and the Portuguese Governor on her left. To Arthur's left was Lady Florence, who took an opportunity to assure him solemnly that he really "bore his blushing honours, very nicely," and to ask him "how he liked the high places at feasts?"

The supper passed off as brilliantly as most successful suppers do. Mrs. Carr looked charming, and her conversation sparkled like her own champagne; but it seemed to him that, as in the case of the wine, there was too much sting in it. The wine was a little too dry, and her talk a little too full of suppressed sarcasm, though he could not quite tell what it was aimed at,

any more than he could trace the source of the champagne bubbles.

Supper done, he led her back to the ball-room. The second extra was just beginning, and she stood as though she were expecting him to ask her to dance it.

"I am sorry, Mildred, but I must go now. I am engaged this dance."

"Indeed—whom to?" This was very coldly said.

"Lady Florence," he answered confusedly, though there really was no reason why he should be confused.

She looked at him steadily.

"Oh! I forgot, for to-night you are her monopoly. Good-bye."

A little while after this, Arthur thought that he had had about enough dancing for awhile, and went and sat by himself in a secluded spot under the shadow of a tree-fern in a temporary conservatory put up outside a bow-window. The Chinese lantern that hung upon the fern had gone out, leaving his chair in total darkness. Presently a couple strayed in, whom he did not recognise, for he only saw their backs, and placed themselves on a bench before him in such a way as to entirely cut off his retreat. He was making up his mind to disturb them, when they began a conversation, in which the squeezing of hands and mild terms of endearment played a part. Fearing to interrupt, lest he should disturb their equanimity, he judged it best to stop where he was. Presently, however, their talk took a turn that proved intensely interesting to him. It was something as follows—

She. "Have you seen the hero of the evening?"

He. "Who? Do you mean the Portuguese Governor in his war-paint?"

She. "No, of course not. You don't call him a hero, do you? I mean our hostess's *fiancé*, the nice-looking young fellow who took her in to supper."

He. "Oh, yes. I did not think much of him. Lucky dog! but he must be rather mean. They say that he is engaged to a girl in England, and has thrown her over for the widow."

She. "Ah, you're jealous! I know that you would like to be in his shoes. Come, confess."

He. "You are very unkind. Why should I be jealous when——"

She. "Well, you need not hurt my hand, and will you *never* remember that black shows against white!"

He. "It's awfully hot here; let's go into the garden."
[*Exeunt.*]

CHAPTER XXXII.

AND AFTER.

ARTHUR emerged from his hiding-place, horror-struck at learning what was being said about him, and wondering, so far as he was at the moment capable of accurate thought, how long this report had been going about, and whether by any chance it had reached the ears of the Bellamys. If it had, the mischief might be very serious. In the confusion of his mind, only two things were clear to him—one was, that both for Mildred's and his own sake, he must leave Madeira at once; and, secondly, that he would dance no more with her that night.

Meanwhile the ball was drawing to a close, and presently he heard the strains of the last galop strike up. After the band had been playing for a minute or so, a natural curiosity drew him to the door of the ball-room,

to see if Mildred was dancing with anybody else. Here he found Lady Florence, looking rather disconsolate.

"How is it that you are not dancing?" she asked.

He murmured something inaudible about "partner."

"Well, we are in the same box. What do you think? I promised this galop to Captain Clemence, and now there he is, vainly trying to persuade Mrs. Carr, who won't look at him, and appears to be waiting for somebody else—you, I should think—to give him the dance. I will be even with him, though."

Just then the music reached a peculiarly seductive passage.

"Oh, come along!" said Lady Florence, quite regardless of the proprieties; and, before Arthur well knew where he was, he was whirling round the room.

Mrs. Carr was standing at the top corner, where the crush obliged him to slacken his pace, and, as he did so, he caught her eye. She was talking to Lady Florence's faithless partner, with a smile upon her lips; but one glance at her face sufficed to tell him that she was in a royal rage, and, what was more, with himself. His partner noticed it, too, and was amused.

"Unless I am mistaken, Mr. Heigham, you have come into trouble. Look at Mrs. Carr." And she laughed.

But that was not all. Either from sheer mischief, or from curiosity to see what would happen, she insisted upon stopping, as the dance drew to a close, by Mildred's corner. That lady, however, proved herself equal to the occasion.

"Mr. Heigham," she said sweetly, "do you know that that was our dance?"

"Oh, was it?" he replied, feeling very much a fool.

"Yes, certainly it was; but with such a temptation to

error"—and she smiled towards Lady Florence—"it is not wonderful that you made a mistake, and, as you look so contrite, you shall be forgiven. Agatha, there's a dear, just ask that man to go up to the band, and tell them to play another waltz, 'La Berceuse,' before 'God save the Queen.'"

Arthur felt all the while, though Mildred was talking so suavely, that she was in a state of suppressed rage; once he glanced at her, and saw that her eyes seemed to flash. But her anger only made her look more lovely, supplying as it did an added dignity and charm to her sweet features. Nor did she allow it to have full play.

Mildred felt that the crisis in her fortunes was far too serious to admit of being trifled with. She knew how unlikely it was that she would ever have a better chance with Arthur than she had now, for the mirrors told her that she was looking her loveliest, which was very lovely indeed. In addition, she was surrounded by every seductive circumstance that could assist to compel a young man, however much engaged, to commit himself by some act or words of folly. The sound and sights of beauty, the rich odour of flowers, the music's voluptuous swell, and last, but not least, the pressure of her gracious form and the glances from her eyes, which alone were enough to make fools of ninety-nine out of every hundred young men in Europe—all these things combined to help her. And to them must be added her determination, that concentrated strength of will employed to a single end, which, if there be any truth in the theories of the action of mind on mind, cannot fail to influence the individual on whom it is directed.

"Now, Arthur."

The room was very nearly clear, for it was drawing

towards daylight when they floated away together. Oh! what a waltz was that! The incarnate spirit of the dance took possession of them. She waltzed divinely, and there was scarcely anything to check their progress. On, on they sped with flying feet as the music rose and fell above them. And soon things began to change for Arthur. All sense of embarrassment and regret vanished from his mind, which now appeared to be capable of holding but one idea of the simplest and yet the most soaring nature. He thought that he was in heaven with Mildred Carr. On, still on; now he saw nothing but her shell-like face and the large flash of the circling diamonds, felt nothing but the pressure of her form and her odorous breath upon his cheek, heard nothing but the soft sound of her breathing. Closer he clasped her; there was no sense of weariness in his feet or oppression in his lungs; he could have danced for ever. But all too soon the music ceased with a crash, and they were standing with quick breath and sparkling eyes by the spot that they had started from. Close by Miss Terry was sitting yawning.

"Agatha, say good-bye to those people for me. I must get a breath of fresh air. Give me a glass of water, please, Arthur."

He did so, and, by way of composing his own nerves, took a tumbler of champagne. He had no longer any thought of anxiety or danger, and he, too, longed for air. They passed out into the garden, and, by a common consent, made their way to the museum verandah, which was, as it proved, quite deserted.

The night, which was drawing to its close, was perfect. Far over the west the setting moon was sinking into the silver ocean, whilst the first primrose hue of dawn crept up the eastern sky. It was essentially a

dangerous night, especially after dancing and champagne—a night to make people do and say regrettable things; for, as one of the poets—is it not Byron?—has profoundly remarked, there is the very devil in the moon at times.

They stood and gazed awhile at the softness of its setting splendours, and listened to the sounds of the last departing guests fading into silence, and to the murmurs of the quiet sea. At last she spoke, very low and musically.

“I was angry with you. I brought you here to scold you; but on such a night I cannot find the heart.”

“What did you want to scold me about?”

“Never mind; it is all forgotten. Look at that setting moon and the silver clouds above her,” and she dropped her hand, from which she had slipped the glove, upon his own.

“And now look at me and tell me how I look, and how you liked the ball. I gave it to please you.”

“You look very lovely, dangerously lovely, and the ball was splendid. Let us go.”

“Do you think me lovely, Arthur?”

“Yes; who could help it? But let us go in.”

“Stay awhile, Arthur; do not leave me yet. Tell me, is not this necklace undone! Fasten it for me, Arthur.”

He turned to obey, but his hand shook too much to allow him to do so. Her eyes shone into his own, her fragrant breath played upon his brow, and her bosom heaved beneath his shaking hand. She too was moved; light tremors ran along her limbs, the colour came and went upon her neck and brow, and a dreamy look had gathered in her tender eyes. Beneath them the sea made its gentle music, and above the wind was whispering to the trees. Presently his hand dropped, and he stood fascinated.

"I cannot. What makes you look like that? You are bewitching me."

Next moment he heard a sigh, the next Mildred's sweet lips were upon his own, and she was in his arms. She lay there still, quite still, but even as she lay there rose, as it were, in the midst of the glamour and confusion of his mind, that made him see all things distraught, and seemed to blot out every principle of right and honour, another and far different scene. For, as in a vision, he saw a dim English landscape and a grey ruin, and himself within its shadows with a nobler woman in his arms, "Dethrone me," said a remembered voice, "desert me, and I will still thank you for this hour of imperial happiness." The glamour was gone, the confusion made straight, and clear above him shone the light of duty.

"Mildred, dear Mildred, this cannot be. Sit down. I want to speak to you."

She turned quite white, and sank from his arms without a word.

"Mildred, you know that I am engaged."

The lips moved, but no sound issued from them. Again she tried.

"I know."

"Then why do you tempt me? I am only a man, and weak as water in your presence. Do not make me dishonourable to myself and her."

"I love you as well as she. There—take the shameful truth!"

"Yes, but—forgive me if I pain you, for I must, I must. I love *her*."

The beautiful face hid itself in the ungloved hands.

No answer came, only the great diamond sparkled and blazed in the soft light like a hard and cruel eye.

"Do not, Mildred, for pity's sake, involve us all in shame and ruin, but let us part now. If I could have foreseen how this would end! But I have been a blind and selfish fool. I have been to blame."

She was quite calm now, and spoke in her usual singularly clear voice.

"Arthur, dear, I do not blame you. Loving *her*, how was it likely that you should think of love from *me*? I only blame myself. I have loved you, God help me, ever since we met—loved you with a despairing, desperate love such as I hope that you may never know. Was I to allow your phantom Angela to snatch the cup from my lips without a struggle, the only happy cup I ever knew? For, Arthur, at the best of times, I have not been a happy woman; I have always wanted love, and it has not come to me. Perhaps I should be, but I am not—a high ideal being. I am as Nature made me, Arthur, a poor creature, unable to stand alone against such a current as has lately swept me with it. But you are quite right, you must leave me, we *must* separate, you *must* go; but oh God, when I think of the future, the hard, loveless future——"

She paused a while, and then went on—

"I did not think to harm you or involve you in trouble, though I hoped to win some small portion of your love, and I had something to give you in exchange, if beauty and great wealth are really worth anything. But you must go, dear, now, whilst I am brave. I hope that you will be happy with your Angela. When I see your marriage in the paper, I shall send her this tiara as

a wedding present. I shall never wear it again. Go dear: go quick."

He turned to leave, not trusting himself to speak, for the big tears stood in his eyes, and his throat was choked. When he had reached the steps, she called him back.

"Kiss me once before you go, and I see your dear face no more. I used to be a proud woman, and to think that I can stoop to rob a kiss from Angela. Thank you; you are very kind. And now one word: you know a woman always loves a last word. Sometimes it happens that we put up idols, and a stronger hand than ours shatters them to dust before our eyes. I trust this may not be your lot. I love you so well that I can say that honestly; but, Arthur, if it should be, remember that in all the changes of this cold world there is one heart which will never forget you, and never set up a rival to your memory, one place where you will always find a home. If anything should ever happen to break your life, come back to me for comfort, Arthur. I can talk no more; I have played for high stakes—and lost. Good-bye."

He went, without a word.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

A VISION OF THE MIST.

IN the winter or early spring, have you ever come from a hot-house where you have admired some tropical bloom, and then, in walking by the hedgerows, seen a primrose looking bravely into bitter weather's face? If so, should it be your habit to notice flowers, you will have experienced some such sensation as takes possession of my mind when I pass from the story of Mildred as she was then, storm-tossed and loving, to Angela, as loving indeed, and yet more anxious, but simple-minded as a child, and not doubtful for the end. They were both flowers indeed, and both beautiful, but between them there was a wide difference. The one, in the richness of her splendour, gazed upon the close place where she queened it, and was satisfied with the beauty round her, or, if not satisfied, she could imagine none different. The limits of that little spot formed the horizon of her mind—she knew no world beyond. The other, full of possibilities, shed sweetness even on the blast which cut her, and looked up for shelter towards the blue sky that she knew endured eternally above the driving clouds.

While Sir John Bellamy's health was being recruited at Madeira, Angela's daily life pursued an even and,

comparatively speaking, a happy course. She missed Pigott much, but then she often went to see her, and by way of compensation, if she had gone, so had George Caresfoot and Lady Bellamy. Mr. Fraser, too, had come back to fill a space in her loneliness, and for his presence she was very grateful. Indeed none but herself could know the comfort and strength she gathered from his friendship, none but he could know what it cost him to comfort her. But he did not shrink from the duty; indeed, it gave him a melancholy satisfaction. He loved her quite as dearly, and with as deep a longing as Mildred Carr did Arthur; but how different were his ends! Of ultimately supplanting his rival he never dreamt; his aim was to assist him, to help to bring the cup untainted to his lips. And so Mr. Fraser read with her and talked with her, and was sick at heart; and she thanked him, and consecrating all her most sacred thoughts to the memory of her absent lover, and all her quick energies to self-preparation for his coming, possessed her soul in patience.

And thus her life began to bloom again with a fresh promise. The close of each departing day was the lifting of a portion of her load, for it brought her nearer to her lover, subtracting something from the long tale of barren hours; since to her all hours seemed most barren that were not quickened by his presence. Indeed, no Arctic winter could be colder and more devoid of light and life than this time of absence was to Angela, and, had it not been for the splendour of her hopes, shooting its promise in unreal gleams across the blackness of her horizon, she felt as though she must have frozen and died. For Hope, elusive as she is, often bears a fairer mien than the realisation to which she points, and serves to keep the

heart alive till the first bitterness is overpast, and, schooled in trouble, it can know her false, and yet remain unbroken.

But sometimes Angela's mood would change, and then, to her strained and sensitive mind, this dead calm and cessation of events would seem to resemble that ominous moment in tropic seas, when the outrider of the tempest has passed howling away clothed in flying foam. Then comes a calm, and for a space there is blue sky, the sails flap drearily against the masts, and the vessel only rocks from the violence of her past plunging, while the scream of the sea-birds is heard with unnatural clearness, for there is no sound nor motion in the air. Intenser still grows the silence, and the waters almost cease from tossing; but the seaman knows that presently, with a sudden roar, the armies of the winds and waves will leap upon him, and that a struggle for life is at hand.

Such fears, however, did not often take her, for, unlike Arthur, she was naturally of a hopeful mind, and, when they did, Mr. Fraser would find means to comfort her. But this was soon to change.

One afternoon—it was Christmas Eve—Angela went down the village to see Pigott, now comfortably established in the house her long departed husband had left her. It was a miserable December day, a damp, unpleasant ghost of a day, and all the sky was packed with clouds, while the surface of the earth was wrapped in mist. Rain and snow fell noiselessly by turns; indeed, the only sound in the air was the loud dripping of water from the trees on the dead leaves beneath. While Angela was in her nurse's cottage, the snow fell in earnest for an hour or so, and then held up again, and when she came out the mist had recovered its supremacy, and the snow was melting.

"Come, miss, you must be getting home, or it will be dark. Shall I come with you a bit?"

"No, thank you, Pigott. I am not afraid of the dark, and I ought to know my way about these parts. Good-night, dear."

The prevailing dismalness of the scene depressed her, and she made up her mind to go and see Mr. Fraser, instead of returning at once to her lonely home. With this view, leaving the main road that ran through Rewtham, Bratham, and Isleworth to Roxham, she turned up a little bye-lane which led to the foot of the lake. Just as she did so, she heard the deadened footfall of a fast-trotting horse, accompanied by the faint roll of carriage-wheels over the snow. As she turned half involuntarily to see who it was that travelled so fast, the creeping mist was driven aside by a puff of wind, and she saw a splendid blood-horse drawing an open victoria, trotting past her at, at least, twelve miles an hour. But, quickly as it passed, it was not too quick for her to recognise Lady Bellamy wrapped up in furs, her dark, stern face looking on straight before her, as though the mist had no power to dim *her* sight. Next second the gloom closed in, and the carriage had vanished like a dream in the direction of Isleworth.

Angela shivered; the dark afternoon seemed to have grown darker to her.

"So she *is* back," she said to herself. "I felt that she was back. She makes me feel afraid."

Going on her way, she came to a spot where the path forked, one track leading to a plank with a hand-rail spanning the stream that fed the lake, and the other to some stepping-stones, by crossing which and following the path on the other side a short cut could be made to the rectory. The bridge and the stepping-stones were not

more than twenty yards apart, but so intent was Angela upon her own thoughts and upon placing her feet accurately on the stones that she did not notice a little man with a red comforter, who was leaning on the hand-rail, engaged apparently in meditation. The little man, however, noticed her, for he gave a violent start, and apparently was about to call out to her, when he changed his mind. He was Sir John Bellamy.

“Better let her go perhaps, John,” he said, addressing his own effigy in the water. “After all, it will be best for you to let things take their course, and not to burn your own fingers or commit yourself in any way, John. You will trap them more securely so. If you were to warn the girl now, you would only expose them; if you wait till he has married her, you will altogether destroy them with the help of that young Heigham. And perhaps by that time you will have touched those compromising letters, John, and made a few other little arrangements, and then you will be able to enjoy the sweets of revenge meted out with a quart measure, not in beggarly ones or twos. But you are thinking of the girl—eh, John? Ah! you always were a pitiful beggar; but tread down the inclination, decline to gratify it. If you do, you will spoil your own hand. The girl must take her chance—oh! clearly the girl must take her chance. But all the same, John, you are very sorry for her—very. Come, come, you must be off, or her ladyship and the gentle George will be kept waiting;” and away he went at a brisk pace, cheerfully singing a verse of a comic song. Sir John was a merry little man.

In due course Angela reached the rectory, and found Mr. Fraser seated in his study reading.

"Well, my dear, what brings you here? What a dreary night!"

"Yes, it is dreadfully damp and lonesome; the people look like ghosts in the mist, and their voices sound hollow. A proper day for evil things to creep home," and she laughed drearily.

"What do you mean?" he answered, with a quick glance at her face, which wore an expression of nervous anxiety.

"I mean that Lady Bellamy has come back; is she not an evil thing?"

"Hush, Angela; you should not talk so. You are excited, dear. Why should you call her evil?"

"I don't know; but have you never noticed her? Have you never seen her creep, creep, like a tiger on its prey? Watch her dark face, and see the bad thoughts come and peep out of her eyes as the black pupils swell and then shrivel, till they are no larger than the head of this black pin, and you will know that she is evil, and does evil work."

"My dear, my dear, you are upset to talk so."

"Oh! no, I am not upset; but did you ever have a presentiment?"

"Plenty; but never one that came true."

"Well, I have a presentiment now—yes, a presentiment—it caught me in the mist."

"What is it? I am anxious to hear."

"I don't know—I cannot say; it is not clear in my mind. I cannot see it, but it is evil, and it has to do with that evil woman."

"Come, Angela, you must not give way to this sort of thing; you will make yourself ill. Sit down, there is a good girl, and have some tea."

She was standing by the window staring out into the mist, her fingers alternately intertwining and unlacing themselves, whilst an unusual—almost an unearthly expression, played upon her face. Turning, she obeyed him.

"You need not fear for me. I am tough, and growing used to troubles. What was it you said? Oh! tea. Thank you; that reminds me. Will you come and have dinner with me to-morrow after church? It is Christmas Day, you know. Pigott has given me a turkey she has been fattening, and I made the mincemeat myself, so there will be plenty to eat if we can find the heart to eat it."

"But your father, my dear?"

"Oh! you need not be afraid. I have got permission to ask you. What do you think? I actually talked to my father for ten whole minutes yesterday; he wanted to avoid me when he saw me, but I caught him in a corner. He took advantage of the opportunity to try to prevent me from going to see Pigott, but I would not listen to him, so he gave it up. What did he mean by that? Why did he send her away? What does it all mean? Oh! Arthur, when will you come back, Arthur?" and, to Mr. Fraser's infinite distress, she burst into tears.

CHAPTER II.

DEAD!

PRESENTIMENTS are no doubt foolish things, and yet, at the time that Angela was speaking of hers to Mr. Fraser, a consultation was going on in a back study at Isleworth that might almost have justified it. The fire was the only light in the room, and gathered round it, talking very low, their features thrown alternately into strong light and dark shadow, were George Caresfoot

and Sir John and Lady Bellamy. It was evident from the strong expression of interest, almost of excitement, on their faces that they were talking of some matter of great importance.

Sir John was, as usual, perched on the edge of his chair, rubbing his dry hands and eliciting occasional sparks in the shape of remarks, but he was no longer merry; indeed, he looked ill at ease. George, his red hair rumped up, and his long limbs thrust out towards the fire, spoke scarcely at all, but glued his little blood-shot eyes alternately on the faces of his companions, and only contributed an occasional chuckle. But the soul of this witches' gathering was evidently Lady Bellamy. She was standing, and energetically detailing some scheme, the great pupils of her eyes expanding and contracting as the unholy flame within them rose and fell.

"Then that is settled," she said at last.

George nodded. Bellamy said nothing.

"I suppose that silence gives consent. Very well, I will take the first step to-morrow. I do not like Angela Caresfoot, but, upon my word, I shall be sorry for her before she is twenty-four hours older. She is made of too fine a material to be sold into such hands as yours, George Caresfoot."

George looked up menacingly, but said nothing.

"I have often urged you to give this up; now I urge no more—the thing is done in spirit, it may as well be done in reality. I told you long ago that it was a dreadfully wicked thing, and that nothing but evil can come of it. Do not say that I have not warned you."

"Come, stop that devil's talk," growled George.

"Devil's talk!—that's a good word, George, for it is of the devil's wages that I am telling you. Now listen,

I am going to prophesy. A curse will fall upon this house and all within it. I know it will," and she paused.

At that moment a strange thing happened. A gust of wind, making its way from some entrance in the back of the house, burst open the door of the room in which they were, and entered with a cold flap as of wings. Next second a terrible crash resounded from the other end of the room. George turned white as a sheet and sank into a chair, cursing feebly. Bellamy gave a howl of terror and shrank up to his wife, almost falling into the fire in his efforts to get behind her. Lady Bellamy alone, remaining undaunted, laughed aloud.

"Come, one of you brave conspirators against a defenceless girl, strike a light, for the place is as dark as a vault, and let us see what has happened."

After several efforts George succeeded in doing as she bade him, and held a candle forward in his trembling hand.

"Come, don't be foolish," she said; "a picture has fallen, that is all."

He advanced to look at it, and then benefited his companions with a further assortment of curses. The picture, on examination, proved to be a large one that some years previously he had caused to be painted of Isleworth, with the Bellamys and himself in the foreground. The frame was shattered, and all the centre of the canvas had been torn out by the weight of its fall on to a life-sized and beautiful statue of Andromeda chained to a rock, awaiting her fate with a stare of agonised terror in her eyes.

"An omen, a very palpable omen," said Lady Bellamy, with one of her dark smiles. "Isleworth and ourselves

destroyed by being dashed against a marble girl, who rises uninjured from the wreck. Eh, John?"

"Don't touch me, you sorceress," replied Sir John, who was shaking with fear. "I believe that you are Satan in person."

"You are strangely complimentary, even for a husband."

"Perhaps I am, but I know your dark ways, and I tell you both that I have done with the job. I will have nothing more to do with it. I will know nothing more about it."

"You hear what he says," said Lady Bellamy to George. "John does not like omens. For the last time, will you give it up, or will you go on?"

"I can't give her up—I can't indeed; it would kill me," answered George, wringing his hands. "There is a fiend driving me along this path."

"Not a doubt of it," said Sir John, who was staring at the broken picture with chattering teeth, and eyes almost starting out of his head; "but if I were you, I should get him to drive me a little straighter, that's all."

"You are poor creatures, both of you," said Lady Bellamy; "but we will, then, decide to go on."

"Fiat 'injuria' ruat cœlum," said Sir John, who knew a little Latin; and, frightened as he was, could not resist the temptation to air it.

And then they went and left George still contemplating the horror-stricken face of the nude marble virgin whose eyes appeared to gaze upon the ruins of his picture.

Next morning, being Christmas Day, Lady Bellamy went to church, as behoves a good Christian, and listened to the Divine message of peace on earth and good-will

towards men. So, for the matter of that, did George, and so did Angela. After church, Lady Bellamy drove home to lunch, but she was in no mood for eating, so she left the table, and ordered the victoria to be round in half an hour.

After church, too, Angela and Mr. Fraser ate their Christmas dinner. Angela's melancholy had to some extent melted beneath the genial influence of the Christmas-tide, and her mind had taken comfort from the words of peace and everlasting love which she had heard that morning, and for a while, at any rate, she forgot her forebodings. The unaccustomed splendour of the dinner, too, had diverted her attention, for she was easily pleased with such things, and altogether she was in a more comfortable frame of mind than she had been on the previous evening, and was inclined to indulge in a pleasant talk with Mr. Fraser upon various subjects, mostly classical and Arthurian. She had already cracked some filberts for him, plucked by herself in the autumn, and specially preserved in a damp jar, and was about to settle herself in a chair by the fire, when suddenly she turned white and stood quite still.

"Hark!" she said, "do you hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"Lady Bellamy's horse—the black horse that trots so fast."

"I can hear nothing, Angela."

"But I can. She is on the high-road yet; she will be here very soon; that horse trots fast."

"Nonsense, Angela; it is some other horse."

But, as he spoke, the sound of a powerful animal trotting very rapidly became distinctly audible.

"It has come—the evil news—and she has brought it."

"Rubbish, dear; somebody to see your father, no doubt."

A minute elapsed, and then Mrs. Jakes, now the only servant in the house, was heard shuffling along the passage, followed by a firm, light step.

"Don't leave me," said Angela to Mr. Fraser. "God give me strength to bear it!" she went on beneath her breath. She was still standing staring vacantly towards the door, pale, and her bosom heaving. The intensity of her anxiety had to some extent communicated itself to Mr. Fraser, for there are few things so catching as anxiety, except enthusiasm; he, too, had risen, and was standing in an attitude of expectancy.

"Lady Bellamy to see yer," said Mrs. Jakes, pushing her head through the half-opened door.

Next second she had entered.

"I must apologise for disturbing you at dinner, Angela," she began hurriedly, and then stopped and also stood still. There was something very curious about her reception, she thought; both Mr. Fraser and Angela might have been cut out of stone, for neither moved.

Standing thus in the silence of expectancy, the three made a strange picture. On Lady Bellamy's face there was a look of stern determination and suppressed excitement such as became one about to commit a crime.

At last she broke the silence.

"I come to bring you bad news, Angela," she said.

"What have you to say? tell me, quick! No, stop, hear me before you speak. If you have come here with any evil purpose, or with the intention to deceive or betray, pause before you answer. I am a lonely and almost friendless woman, and have no claim except upon your compassion; but it is not always well to deal ill

with such as I, since we have at the last a friend whose vengeance you too must fear. So, by the love of Christ and by the presence of the God who made you, speak to me only such truth as you will utter at His judgment. Now, answer, I am ready."

At her words, spoken with an earnestness and in a voice which made them almost awful, a momentary expression of fear swept across Lady Bellamy's face, but it went as quickly as it came, and the hard, determined look returned. The mysterious eyes grew cold and glittered; the head erected itself. At that moment Lady Bellamy distinctly reminded Mr. Fraser of a hooded cobra about to strike.

"Am I to speak before Mr. Fraser?"

"Speak!"

"What is the good of this high-flown talk, Angela? You seem to know my news before I give it, and believe me it pains me very much to have to give it. *He is dead, Angela.*"

The cobra had struck, but as yet the poison had scarcely begun to work. There was only numbness. Mr. Fraser gave a gasp and half dropped, half fell, into his chair. The noise attracted Angela's attention, and pressing her hand to her forehead she turned towards him with a ghost of a laugh.

"Did I not tell you that this evil woman would bring evil news?" Then addressing Lady Bellamy, "But stop, you forget what I said to you; you do not speak the truth. Arthur dead! How can Arthur be dead and I alive! How is it I do not know that he is dead? Oh, for shame, it is not true, he is not dead."

"This seems to me to be a thankless as well as a painful task," said Lady Bellamy, hoarsely; "but, if you

will not believe me, look here; you know this, I suppose? I took it, as he asked me to do, from his dead hand that it might be given back to you."

"If Mr. Heigham is dead," said Mr. Fraser, "how do you know it? Where did he die, and what of?"

"I know it, Mr. Fraser, because it was my sad duty to nurse him through his last illness at Madeira. He died of enteric fever. I have got a copy of his burial certificate here, which was copied from the Portuguese books. He seems to have had no relations living, poor young man, but Sir John communicated with the family lawyer. Here is the certificate," and she handed Mr. Fraser a paper written in Portuguese and officially stamped.

"You say," broke in Angela, "that you took this ring from his dead hand, the hand on which I placed it. I do not believe you. You beguiled it from his living hand. It cannot be that he is dead; for, if he were, I should have felt it. Oh, Arthur!" and in her misery Angela stretched out her arms and turned her agonised eyes upwards, "if you are dead, come to me, and let me see your spirit face. Have you no voice in the silence? You see he does not come, he is not dead; if he were dead, Heaven could not hold him from my side, or, if it could, it would have drawn me up to his."

"My love, my love!" said Mr. Fraser, in a scared voice, "it is not God's will that the dead should come back to us thus——"

"My poor Angela, why will you not believe me? This is so very painful; do you suppose that I want to torture you by saying what is not true about your lover? The idea is absurd. I had meant to keep it till you were calmer; but I have a letter for you. Read it and convince yourself."

Angela almost snatched the paper from her outstretched hand. It ran thus, in characters almost illegible from weakness:—

“DEAREST,—Good-bye. I am dying of fever. Lady Bellamy will take back your ring when it is over. Try to forget me, and be happy. Too weak to write more. Good-bye, God——”

At the foot of this broken and almost illegible letter was scrawled the word “ARTHUR.”

Angela read it slowly, and then at length the poison did its work. She did not speak wildly any more, or call upon Arthur; she was stung back to sense, but all the light went out of her eyes.

“It is his writing,” she said, slowly. “I beg your pardon. It was good of you to nurse him.”

Then, pressing the paper to her bosom with one hand, with the other she groped her way towards the door.

“It is very dark,” she said.

Lady Bellamy’s eyes gave a flash of triumph, and then she stood watching this pitiable exhibition of human misery as curiously as ever a Roman matron watched an expiring gladiator. When Angela was near the door, the letter still pressed against her heart, she spoke again.

“The blow comes from God, Angela, and the religion and spiritual theories which you believe in will bring you consolation. Perhaps it is a blessing in disguise—a thing that you will in time even learn to be thankful for.”

Lady Bellamy had overacted her part. The words did not ring true; they jarred upon Mr. Fraser; much more did they jar upon Angela’s torn nerves. Her pale cheek flushed, and she turned and spoke, but there was

no anger in her face, nothing but sorrow that dignified, and an unfathomable love. Only the eyes seemed as sightless as those of one walking in her sleep.

"When your hour of dreadful trouble comes, as it will come, pray God that there will be none to mock you as you mock me." And she turned like a stricken thing, and went slowly out, blindly groping her way along.

Her last words had hit the victor hard. Who can say what hidden string they touched, or what prescience of evil they awakened? But they went nigh to felling her. Clutching the mantelpiece, Lady Bellamy gasped for air; then, recovering a little, she said—

"Thank God, that is over!"

Mr. Fraser scarcely saw this last incident. So overwhelmed was he at the sight of Angela's agony that he had covered his face with his hand. When he lifted it again, Lady Bellamy was gone, and he was alone.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER THREE MONTHS.

THREE months had passed since that awful Christmas Day. Angela was heart-broken, and, after the first burst of her despair, turned herself to the only consolation which was left her. It was not of this world.

She did not question the truth of the dreadful news that Lady Bellamy had brought her, and, if ever a doubt arose in her breast, a glance at the ring and the letter effectually quelled it. Nor did she get brain-fever or any other illness; her young and healthy frame was too strong a citadel to be taken out of hand by sorrow. And this to her was one of the most wonderful things in her affliction. It had come and crushed her, and life still went

on much as before. The sun of her system had fallen, and yet the system was not appreciably deranged. It was dreadful to her to think that Arthur was dead, but an added sting lay in the fact that she was not dead too. Oh! how glad she would have been to die, since death had become the gate through which she needs must pass to reach her lover's side.

For it had been given to Angela, living so much alone, and thinking so long and deeply upon these great mysteries of our being, to soar to the heights of a noble faith. To the intense purity of her mind, a living heaven presented itself, a comfortable place, very different from the vague and formularised abstractions with which for the most part we are satisfied; where Arthur and her mother were waiting to greet her, and where the great light of the Godhead would shine around them all. She grew to hate her life, the dull barrier of the flesh that stood between her and her ends. Still she ate and drank enough to support it, still dressed with the same perfect neatness as before, still lived, in short, as though Arthur had not died, and the light and colour had not gone out of her world.

One day—it was in March—she was sitting in Mr. Fraser's study, reading the "Shakespeare" which Arthur had given her, and in the woes of others striving to forget her own. But the attempt proved a failure; she could not concentrate her thoughts, they would continually wander away into space in search of Arthur.

She was dressed in black; from the day that she heard her lover was dead, she would wear no other colour, and as, with her hands idly clasped before her, she gazed out at the driving sleet and snow, Mr. Fraser thought that he had never seen statue, picture, or woman

of such sweet, yet majestic beauty. But it had been filched from the features of an immortal. The spirit-look which at times had visited her from a child now continually shone upon her face, and to the sight of sinful men her eyes seemed almost awful in their calm and purity. She smiled but seldom now, and, when she did, it was in those grey eyes that the radiance began: her features scarcely seemed to move.

"What are you thinking of, Angela?"

"I am thinking, Mr. Fraser, that it is only fourteen weeks to-day since Arthur died, and that it is very likely that I shall live another forty or fifty years before I see him. I am only twenty-one, and I am so strong. Even this shock has not hurt me."

"Why should you want to die?"

"Because all the beauty and light has gone out of my life; because I prefer to trust myself into the hands of God rather than to the tender mercies of the world; because he is there, and I am here, and I am tired of waiting."

"Have you no fear of death?"

"I have never feared death, and least of all do I fear it now. Why, the veriest coward would not shrink back when the man she loved was waiting for her. And I am not a coward, and if I were told that I must die within an hour, I could say, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!' Cannot you understand me? If all your life and soul were wrapped up in one person, and she died, would you not long to go to her?"

Mr. Fraser made no reply for a while, but in his turn gazed out at the drifting snow, surely not more immacu-

lately pure than this woman who could love with so divine a love. At length he spoke.

"Angela, do you know that it is wrong to talk so? You have no right to set yourself up against the decrees of the Almighty. In His wisdom He is working out ends of which you are one of the instruments. Who are you that you should rebel?"

"No one—a grain, an atom, a wind-tossed feather; but what am I to do with my life, how am I to occupy all the coming years?"

"With your abilities, that is a question easy to answer. Work, write, take the place in scholastic or social literature which I have trained you to fill. For you, fame and fortune lie in an inkstand; your mind is a golden key that will open to your sight all that is worth seeing in the world, and pass you into its most pleasant places. You can become a famous woman, Angela."

She turned upon him sadly.

"I had such ideas; for Arthur's sake I wished to do something great; indeed I had already formed a plan. But, Mr. Fraser, like many another, when I lost my love I lost my ambition too; both lie buried in his grave. I have nothing left to work for; I do not care for fame or money for myself, they would only have been valuable to give to him. At twenty-one I seem to have done with the world's rewards and punishments, its blanks and prizes, its satisfactions and desires, even before I have learnt what they are. My hopes are as dull and leaden as that sky, and yet the sun is behind it. Yes, that is my only hope; the sun is behind, though we cannot see it. Do not talk to me of ambition, Mr. Fraser. I am broken-spirited, and my only ambition is for rest, the rest He gives to his beloved——"

"Rest, Angela! that is the cry of us all; we strive for rest, and here we never find it. You suffer, but do not think that you are alone; everybody suffers in their degree, though perhaps such as you, with the nerves of your mind bared to the roughness of the world's weather, feel mental pain the more acutely. But, my dear, there are few really refined men and women who have not at times sent up that prayer for rest, any rest, even eternal sleep. It is the price they pay for their refinement. But they are not alone. If the heart's cry of every being who endures in this great universe could be collected into a single prayer, that prayer would be, 'Thou who madest us, in pity give us rest!'"

"Yes, we suffer, no doubt, all of us, and implore a peace that does not come. We must learn

'How black is night when golden day is done,
How drear the blindness that hath seen the sun!'

You can tell me that; but tell me, you who are a clergyman, and stronger than I to stand against sorrow, how can we win even a partial peace? If you have a way, however hard, tell it me, for do you know," and she put her hand to her head and a vacant look came into her eyes, "I think that if I must endure much more of the anguish which I sometimes suffer, or suffer any more shocks, I shall go mad? I try to look to the future only and to rise superior to my sorrows, and to a certain extent I succeed, but my mind will not always carry the strain put upon it, but falls heavily to earth like a winged bird. Then it is left to brood upon the bare fact of the death of the man I loved—I sometimes think, as men are not often loved—that my spirit almost breaks down. If you can tell me any cure, anything which will bring me comfort, I shall indeed be grateful to you."

"I think I can, Angela. If you will no longer devote yourself to study, you have only to look round to find another answer to your question as to what you are to do. Are there no poor in these parts for you to visit? Cannot your hands make clothes to cover those who have none? Is there no sickness that you can nurse, no sorrow which you can comfort? I know that even in this parish there are many homes where your presence would be welcome. Remember, Angela, grief can be selfish as well as pleasure."

"You are always right, Mr. Fraser. I think I am selfish in my trouble, but it is a fault that I will try to mend. Indeed, to look at it in this light only, my time is of no benefit to myself, I may as well devote it to others."

"If you do, your labour will bring its own reward, for in helping others to bear their load you will wonderfully lighten your own. Nor need you go far to begin. Why do you not see more of your own father? You are naturally bound to love him. Yet it is but rarely that you speak to him."

"My father! you know he does not like me, my presence is always a source of irritation to him, he cannot even bear me to look at him."

"Oh, surely that must be your fancy; probably he thinks you do not care about him. He has always been a strange and wayward man, I know, but you should remember that he has had bitter disappointments in life, and try to soften him and win him to other thoughts. Do this and you will soon find that he will be glad enough of your company."

"I will try to do as you say, Mr. Fraser, but I confess I have only small hopes of success. Have you any parish work I can do?"

Nor did the matter end there, as is so often the case where parish work and young ladies are concerned. And, as Mr. Fraser had prophesied, she found that her labour was of a sort which brought a certain reward.

CHAPTER IV.

GEORGE FALLS ILL.

ON one point, however, Angela's efforts failed completely; she could make no headway with her father. He shrank more than ever from her society, and at last asked her to oblige him by allowing him to follow his own path in peace. Of Arthur's death he had never spoken to her, or she to him, but she knew that he had heard of it.

Philip had heard of it thus. On that Christmas afternoon he had been taking his daily exercise when he met Lady Bellamy returning from the Abbey House. The carriage stopped, and she got out to speak to him.

"Have you been to the Abbey House to pay a Christmas visit?" he asked. "It is very kind of you to come and see us so soon after your return."

"I am the bearer of bad news, so I did not loiter."

"Bad news! What was it?"

"Mr. Heigham is dead," she answered, watching his face narrowly.

"Dead, impossible!"

"He died of enteric fever at Madeira. I have just been to break the news to Angela."

"Oh, indeed, she will be pained; she was very fond of him, you know."

Lady Bellamy smiled contemptuously.

"Did you ever see any one put to the extremest tor-

ture? If you have, you can guess how your daughter was 'pained.' "

Philip winced.

"Well, I can't help it; it is no affair of mine. Good-bye," and then, as soon as she was out of hearing, "I wonder if she lies, or if she has murdered him. George must have been putting on the screw."

Into the particulars of Arthur Heigham's death, or supposed death, he never inquired. Why should he? It was no affair of his; he had long ago washed his hands of the whole matter, and left things to take their chance. If he was dead, well and good, he was very sorry for him; if he was alive, well and good also. In that case, he would no doubt arrive on the appointed date to marry Angela.

But, notwithstanding all this unanswerable reasoning, he still found it quite impossible to look his daughter in the face. Her eyes still burnt him, ay, more than ever did they burn, for her widowed dress and brow were agony to him, and rent his heart, not with remorse but fear. But still his greed kept the upper hand; though death by mental torture must result, yet he would glut himself with his desire. More than ever he hungered for those wide lands which, if only things fell out right, would become his at so ridiculous a price. Decidedly Arthur Heigham's death was "no affair of his."

About six weeks before Angela's conversation with Mr. Fraser, which ended in her undertaking parish work, a rumour had got about that George Caresfoot had been taken ill, very seriously ill. It was said that a chill had settled on his lungs, which had never been very strong since his fever, and that he had, in short, gone into a consumption.

Of George, Angela had neither seen nor heard anything for some time—not since she received the welcome letter in which he relinquished his suit. Indeed, with that natural readiness of the human mind to forget unpleasant occurrences, she had thought but little about him of late, since her mind had been more fully occupied with other and more pressing things. Still she vaguely wondered at times if he was really so ill as her father thought.

One day she was walking home by the path round the lake, after paying a visit to a sick child in the village, when she suddenly came face to face with her father. She expected that, as usual, he would pass on without addressing her, and drew to one side of the path to allow him to do so, but to her surprise he stopped.

“Where have you been, Angela?”

“To see Ellen Mint; she is very ill, poor child.”

“You had better be careful; you will be catching scarlet fever or something—there is a great deal about.”

“I am not at all afraid.”

“Yes; but you never think that you may bring it home to me.”

“I never thought that there was any likelihood of my bringing anything to you. We see so little of each other.”

“Well, well, I have been to Isleworth to see your cousin George; he is very ill.”

“You told me that he was ill some time back. What is it that is really the matter with him?”

“Galloping consumption. He cannot last long.”

“Poor man! why does he not go to a warmer climate?”

“I don’t know—that is his affair. But it is a serious matter for me. If he dies under present circumstances,

all the Isleworth estates, which are mine by right, must pass away from the family for ever."

"Why must they pass away?"

"Because your grandfather, with a refined ingenuity, made a provision in his will that George was not to leave them back to me, as he was telling me this afternoon he is anxious to do. If he were to die now with a will in my favour, or without any will at all, they would all go to some far away cousins in Scotland."

"He died of heart-disease, did he not?—my grandfather, I mean?"

Philip's face grew black as night, and he shot a quick glance of suspicion at his daughter.

"I was saying," he went on, without answering her question, "that George may sell the land or settle it, but must not leave it to me or you, nor can I take under an intestacy."

Angela did not understand these legal intricacies, and knew about as much about the law of intestacy as she did of Egyptian inscriptions.

"Well," she said, consolingly, "I am very sorry, but it can't be helped, can it?"

"The girl is a born fool," muttered Philip beneath his breath, and passed on.

A week or so afterwards, just when the primroses and Lent-lilies were in bloom and all the air was full of song, Angela heard more about her cousin George. Mr. Fraser was one day sent for to Isleworth; Lady Bellamy brought him the message, saying that George was in such a state of health that he wished to see a clergyman.

"I never saw a worse case," he said to Angela on his return. "He does not leave the house, but lies in a darkened room coughing and spitting blood. He is, I

should say, going off fast; but he refuses to see a doctor. His frame of mind, however, is most Christian, and he seems to have reconciled himself to the prospect of a speedy release."

"Poor man!" said Angela, sympathetically; "he sent and asked to see you, did he not?"

"Well—yes; but when I got there he talked more about the things of this world than of the next. He is greatly distressed about your father. I daresay you have heard how your cousin George supplanted your father in the succession to the Isleworth estates. Your grandfather disinherited him, you know, because of his marriage with your mother. Now that he is dying, he sees the injustice of this, but is prevented by the terms of your grandfather's will from restoring the land to your branch of the family, so it must pass to some distant cousins—at least, so I understand the matter."

"You always told me that it is easy to drive a coach and four through wills and settlements and legal things. If he is so anxious to do so, can he not find a way out of the difficulty—I mean, some honourable way?"

"No, I believe not, except an impossible one," and Mr. Fraser smiled a rather forced smile.

"What is that?" asked Angela, carelessly.

"Well, that he should—should marry *you* before he dies. At least, you know, he says that that is the only way in which he could legally transfer the estates."

Angela started and turned pale.

"Then I am afraid the estates will never be transferred. How would that help him?"

"Well, he says he could then enter into a nominal sale of the estates to your father and settle the money on you."

"And why could he not do this without marrying me?"

"I don't know. I don't understand much about these things, I am not a business man; but it is impossible for some reason or another. But of course it is absurd. Good-night, my dear. Don't overdo it in the parish."

Another week passed without any particular news of George's illness, except that he was getting weaker, when one day Lady Bellamy appeared at the Abbey House, where she had not been since that dreadful Christmas Day. Angela felt quite cold when she saw her enter, and her greeting was as cold as herself.

"I hope that you bring me no more bad news," she said.

"No, Angela, except that your cousin George is dying, but that is scarcely likely to distress you."

"I am sorry."

"Are you? There is no particular reason why you should be. You do not like him."

"No, I do not like him."

"It is pity though, because I have come to ask you to marry him."

"Upon my word, Lady Bellamy, you seem to be the chosen messenger of everything that is wretched. Last time you came to this house it was to tell me of dear Arthur's death, and now it is to ask me to marry a man whom I detest. I thought that I had told both you and him that I will not marry him. I have gone as near marrying as I ever mean to in this world."

"Really, Angela, you are most unjust to me. Do you suppose that it was any pleasure to me to have such a sad duty to perform? However, it is refreshing to hear you talk so vigorously. Clearly the loss of your lover has not affected your spirits."

Angela winced beneath the taunt, but made no reply.

"But, if you will condescend to look at the matter with a single grain of common-sense, you will see that circumstances have utterly changed since you refused to marry George. Then Mr. Heigham was alive, poor fellow, and then, too, George wanted to marry you as a wife; now he is merely anxious to marry you that he may be enabled to make reparation to your father. He is a fast-dying man. You would never be his wife except in name. The grave would be his only marriage-bed. Do you not understand the difference?"

"Perfectly, but do *you* not understand that whether in deed or in name I cannot outrage my dead Arthur's memory by being for an hour the wife of that man? Do *you* not know that the marriage service requires a woman to swear to 'Love, honour, and obey,' till death parts, whether it be a day or a lifetime away? Can I, even as a mere form, swear to love when I loathe, honour when I despise, obey when my whole life would rise in rebellion against obedience! What are these estates to me that I should do such violence to my conscience and my memories? Estates, of what use are they to one whose future lies in the wards of a hospital or a sisterhood? I will have nothing to do with this marriage, Lady Bellamy."

"Well, I must say, Angela, you do not make much ado about ruining your father to gratify your own sentimental whims. It must be a comfortable thing to have children to help one in one's old age."

Angela reflected on Mr. Fraser's words about her duty to her father, and for the second time that day she winced beneath Lady Bellamy's taunt; but, as she returned no answer, her visitor had no alternative but to drop the subject and depart.

Before she went, however, she had a few words with Philip, urging, as a reason why he should put pressure on Angela, the serious state of George's health and the terms of her grandfather's will, which prevented him from leaving the estates to himself. Somewhat, but not altogether to her surprise, he refused in these terms:

"I don't know to what depths you have gone in this business and it is no affair of mine to inquire, but I have kept to my share of the bargain and I expect you to keep to yours. If you can bring about the marriage with George, well or ill, on the terms I have agreed upon with him, I shall throw no obstacle in the way; but as for my trying to force Angela into it, I should never take the responsibility of doing so, nor would she listen to me. If she speaks to me on the subject, I shall point out how the family will be advantaged, and leave the matter to her. Further I will not go."

CHAPTER V.

ANGELA'S APPEAL.

THREE days after her conversation with Lady Bellamy, Angela received the following letter:—

"Isleworth Hall, Roxham, May 2.

"DEAR COUSIN ANGELA,

"My kind and devoted friend, Lady Bellamy, has told me that she has spoken to you on a subject which is very near to my heart, and that you have distinctly declined to have anything to do with it. Of course I know that the matter lies entirely within your own discretion, but I still venture to lay the following points before you. There have, I am aware, been some painful

passages between us—passages which, under present circumstances, had much better be forgotten. So, first, I ask you to put them quite out of your mind, and to judge of what I have to propose from a very different point of view.

“I write, Angela, to ask you to marry me it is true (since, unfortunately, my health will not allow me to ask you in person), but it is a very different offer from that which I made you in the lane when you so bitterly refused me. Now I am solely anxious that the marriage should take place in order that I may be enabled to avoid the stringent provisions of your grandfather’s will, which, whilst forbidding me to leave these estates back to your father or his issue, fortunately does not forbid a fictitious sale and the settlement of the sum, or otherwise. But I will not trouble you with these details.

“In short, I supplanted your father in youth, and I am now anxious to make every reparation in my power, and at present I am quite unable to make any. Independently of this, it pains me to think of the estate passing away from the old stock, and I should like to know that you, who have been the only woman whom I have felt true affection for, will one day come into possession of it. Of course, as you understand, the marriage would be *nothing but a form*, and if, as I am told, you object to its being gone through with the ceremonies of the Church, it could be made equally legal at a registry-office.

“But please understand, Angela, that I do not wish to press you: it is for you to judge. Only you must judge quickly, for I am a fast-dying man, and am anxious to get this matter off my mind one way or other, in order that I may be able to give it fully to the consideration of

subjects of more vital importance to one in my condition than marrying and giving in marriage.

“Ever, dear cousin Angela,

“Affectionately yours,

“GEORGE CARESFOOT.

“P.S.—Remember you have your father to consider in this matter as well as yourself.”

The receipt of this letter plunged Angela into the greatest distress of mind. It was couched in a tone so courteous and so moderate that it carried with it conviction of its sincerity and truth. If she only had been concerned, she would not long have hesitated, but the idea of her duty to her father rose up before her like a cloud. What was her true duty under the circumstances? There was the rub!

She took the letter to Mr. Fraser and asked his advice. He read it carefully, and thought a long while before he answered. The idea of Angela being united to anybody in marriage, even as a matter of form, was naturally abominable to him, but he was far too honourable and conscientious a man to allow his personal likes or dislikes to interfere with whatever he considered to be his duty. In the end he found it impossible to give any fixed opinion.

“My dear,” he said, “all that I can suggest is that you should take it to your father and hear what he has got to say. After all, it is he who must have your true welfare most at heart. It was into his hands that I heard your mother, in peculiarly solemn words, consign you and your interests. Take it to your father, dear, there is no counsel like that of a father.”

Had Mr. Fraser been the father, this would, doubtless, have been true enough. But though he had known him for so many years, and was privy to so much of his history, he did not yet understand Philip Caresfoot. His own open and guileless nature did not easily suspect evil in another, more especially when that other was the father of her whom he looked upon as the incarnation of all that was holy and pure.

Angela sighed and obeyed—sighed from doubt, obeyed from duty. She handed the letter to Philip without a word—without a word he read it.

“I want your opinion, father,” she said. “I wish to do what is right. You know how painful what has happened has been for me. You know—or, if you do not know, you must have guessed—how completely shattered my life is. As for this marriage, the whole thing is repugnant to me; personally, I had rather sacrifice fifty properties than go through it, but I know that I ought to think of others. Mr. Fraser tells me that it is my duty to consult you, that you will naturally have my interest most at heart, that it was into your hands and to your care that my mother consigned me on her death-bed. Father”—and she clasped her hands and looked him full in the face with her earnest eyes—“Mr. Fraser is right, it must be for you to decide. I will trust you entirely, and leave the burden of decision to your honour and generosity; only I say, spare me if you can.”

Philip rose and went to look out of the window, that he might hide the evident agitation of his face and the tremor of his limbs. He felt that the crucial moment had come. All his poor sophistry, all his miserable shuffling and attempts to fix the responsibility of his acts on others, had recoiled upon his own head. She had

come to him and laid the burden on his heart. What should he answer? For a moment the shades—for with him they were only shades—of good angels gained the upper hand, and he was about to turn and look her in the face—for then he felt he could have looked her in the face—and bid her have nothing to do with George and his proposals. But, even in the act of turning to obey the impulse, his eye fell upon the roof of Isleworth Hall, which, standing on an eminence, could easily be seen from the Abbey House, and his mind, quicker than the eye, flew to the outlook place upon that roof where he had so often climbed as a boy, and surveyed the fair champaign country beyond it: meadow and wood, fallow and cornland, all of which were for him involved in that answer. He did not stop turning, but—so quick is the working of the mind—he changed the nature of his answer. The real presence of the demon of greed chased away the poor angelic shades.

“It would not be much of a sacrifice for you, Angela, to go through this form; he is a dying man, and you need not even change your name. The lands are mine by right, and will be yours. It will break my heart to lose them, after all these years of toiling to save enough to buy them. But I do not wish to force you. In short, I leave the matter to your generosity, as you would have left it to mine.”

“And supposing that I were to marry my cousin George, and he were not to die after all, what would be my position then? You must clearly understand that, to save us all from starvation, I would never be his wife.”

“You need not trouble yourself with the question. He is a dead man; in two months’ time he will be in the family vault.”

She bowed her head and left him—left him with his hot and glowing greed, behind which crept a terror.

Next morning George Caresfoot received the following letter:

“Bratham Abbey, May 5.

“DEAR COUSIN GEORGE,

“In reply to your letter, I must tell you that I am willing to go through the form of marriage with you—at a registry-office, not in church—in order to enable you to carry out the property arrangements you wish to make. You must, however, clearly understand that I do not do this on my own account, but simply and solely to benefit my father, who has left the matter to my ‘generosity.’ I must ask you as a preliminary step to make a copy of and sign the enclosed letter addressed to me. Our lives are in the hand of God, and it is possible that you might be restored to health. In such an event, however improbable it may seem, it cannot be made too plain that I am not, and have never in any sense undertaken to be, your wife.

“Truly yours,

“ANGELA CARESFOOT.”

The enclosure ran as follows:

“I, George Caresfoot, hereby solemnly promise before God that under no possible circumstance will I attempt to avail myself of any rights over my cousin, Angela Caresfoot, and that I will leave her as soon as the formal ceremony of marriage is concluded, and never again attempt to see her except by her own wish; the so-called marriage being only contemplated in order to enable me to carry out certain business arrangements which, in

view of the failing state of my health, I am anxious to enter into."

This letter and its curious enclosure, surely the oddest marriage contract which was ever penned, George, trembling with excitement, thrust into the hands of Lady Bellamy. She read them with a dark smile.

"The bird is springed," she said, quietly. "It has been a close thing, but I told you that I should not fail, as I have warned you of what will follow your success. Sign this paper—this waste-paper—and return it."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SEVENTH OF JUNE.

By return of post Angela received her strange agreement, duly copied and signed, and after this the preparations for the marriage went on rapidly. But where such a large transaction is concerned as the sale of between three and four thousand acres of land, copyhold and freehold, together with sundry rent-charges and the lordship of six manors, things cannot be done in a minute.

Both George and Philip and their respective lawyers—Sir John would have nothing to do with the matter—did their best to expedite matters, but unfortunately some legal difficulty arose in connection with the transfer, and who can hurry the ponderous and capricious machinery of the law?

At length it became clear to all concerned, except Angela, that it would be impossible for the marriage to take place before the eighth of June, and it also became clear that this was the last possible day on which it could take place. George begged Philip (by letter, being too

ill to come and see him) to allow the marriage to be gone through with at once, and have the business transactions finished afterwards. But to this Philip would not consent; the title-deeds, he said, must be in his possession before it took place, otherwise he would have no marriage. George had therefore no option but to accept his terms.

When Angela was told of the date fixed for the ceremony—she would not allow the word marriage to be mentioned in connection with it—she at first created considerable consternation by quietly announcing that she would not have it performed until the tenth of June. At last, however, when matters were growing serious, and when she had treated all the pressure that it was possible to put upon her with quiet indifference—for, as usual, her father declined to interfere, but contented himself with playing a strictly passive part—she suddenly, of her own mere motion, abolished the difficulty by consenting to appear before the registrar on the eighth of June, as George wished.

Her reasons for having objected to this date in the first instance will be easily guessed. It was the day before the anniversary of Arthur's departure, an anniversary which it was her fancy to dedicate solely to his memory. But as the delay—though she could not altogether understand why—appeared to put others to great inconvenience, and as George's state of health had become such as to render postponement even for a couple of days of doubtful expediency, and as, moreover, she decided on reflection that she could better give her thoughts to her dead lover when she had gone through with the grim farce that hung over her, she suddenly changed her mind.

Occasionally they brought her documents to sign, and

she signed them without a question, but on the whole she treated the affair with considerable apathy, the truth being that it was repugnant to her mind, which she preferred to occupy with other and very different thoughts. So she let it go. She knew that she was going to do a thing which was dreadful to her, because she believed it to be her duty, but she comforted herself with the reflection that she was amply secured against all possible contingencies by her previous agreement with George. Angela's knowledge of the marriage-law of her country and of what constituted a legal document was not extensive.

For this same reason, because it was distasteful, she had never said anything of her contemplated marriage to Pigott, and it was quite unknown in the neighbourhood. Since the Miss Lee scandal and his consequent disinheritance, nobody had visited Philip Caresfoot, and those who took interest in him or his affairs were few. Indeed, the matter had been kept a dead secret. But on the seventh of June, being the day previous to the ceremony, Angela went down to her nurse's cottage and told her what was about to be done, suppressing, however, from various motives, all mention of her agreement with George. It added to her depression to find that Pigott was unaccountably disturbed at the news.

"Well, miss," she said,—“Lord, to think that I sha'n't be able to call you that no longer—I haven't got nothing in particular to say agin it, seeing that sure enough the man's a-dying, as I has on good authority from my own aunt's cousin, her that does the servants' washing up at the Hall, and mighty bad she does it, begging of her pardon for the disparagement, and so he won't trouble you for long, and somehow it do seem as though you

hadn't no choice left in the matter, just as though everybody and everything was a-quietly pushing you into it. But, miss, somehow I don't like it, to be plain; a marriage as ain't no marriage ain't altogether natural like, and in an office, too, along with a man as you would not touch with a pair of tongs, and that man on his last leg. I'm right down sorry if I makes you feel uncomfortable, dearie; but, bless me, I don't know how it is, but, when a thing sticks in my mind, I'm as bound to hawk it up as though it were a bone in my throat."

"I don't like it any more than you do, nurse, but perhaps you don't understand all about the property being concerned, and about it's having to pass away from my father, if I don't do this. I care nothing about the property, but he left it to 'my generosity!' Arthur is dead; and he left it to 'my generosity,' nurse. What could I do?"

"Well, miss, you're acting according to what you thinks right and due to your father, which is more nor I does; and poor, dead Mr. Arthur up in Heaven there will make a note of that, there ain't no manner of doubt. And somehow it do seem that things can't be allowed to go wrong with you, my dear, seeing how you're a-sacrificing of yourself and of your wishes to benefit others."

This conversation did not tend to put Angela into better spirits, but she felt that it was now too late to recede.

Whilst Angela was talking to Pigott, Sir John and Lady Bellamy were paying a call at Isleworth. They found George lying on the sofa in the dining-room, in which, though it was the first week in June, a fire was burning on the hearth. He bore all the signs of a man

in the last stage of consumption. The hollow cough, the emaciation, and the hectic hue upon his face, all spoke with an uncertain voice.

"Well, Caresfoot, you scarcely look like a bridegroom, I must say," said little Sir John, looking as pleased as though he had made an eminently cheerful remark.

"No, but I am stronger than I look; marriage will cure me."

"Humph! will it? Then you will be signally fortunate."

"Don't croak, Bellamy. I am happy to-day—there is fire dancing along my veins. Just think, this time to-morrow Angela will be my legal wife!"

"Well, you appear to have given a good price for the privilege, if what Anne tells me is correct. To sell the Isleworth estates for fifty thousand is to sell them for a hundred and fifty thousand less than they are worth. Consequently, the girl costs you a hundred and fifty thousand pounds—a long figure that for one girl."

"Bah! you are a cold-blooded fellow, Bellamy. Can't you understand that there is a positive delight in ruining oneself for the woman one loves? And then, think how she will love me, when she comes to understand what she has cost me. I can see her now. She will come and kiss me—mind you, kiss me of her own free will—and say, 'George, you are a noble fellow; George, you are a lover that any woman may be proud of; no price was too heavy for you.' Yes, that is what she will say, that sort of thing, you know."

Sir John's merry little eye twinkled with inexpressible amusement, and his wife's full lip curled with unutterable contempt.

"You are counting your kisses before they are paid

for," she said. "Does Philip come here this afternoon to sign the deeds?"

"Yes; they are in the next room. Will you come and see them?"

"Yes, I will. Will you come, John?"

"No, thank you. I don't wish to be treated to any more of your ladyship's omens. I have long ago washed my hands of the whole business. I will stop here and read the *Times*."

They went out, George leaning on Lady Bellamy's arm.

No sooner had they gone than Sir John put down the *Times*, and listened intently. Then he rose, and slipped the bolt of that door which opened into the hall, thereby halving his chances of interruption. Next, listening at every step, his round face, which was solemn enough now, stretched forward, and looking for all the world like that of some whiskered puss advancing on a cream-jug, he crept on tiptoe to the iron safe in the corner of the room. Arrived there, he listened again, and then drew a little key from his pocket, and inserted it in the lock; it turned without difficulty.

"Beau-ti-ful," murmured Sir John; "but now comes the rub." Taking another key, he inserted it in the lock of the subdivision. It would not turn. "One more chance," he said, as he tried a second. "Ah," and open came the lid. Rapidly he extracted two thick bundles of letters. They were in Lady Bellamy's handwriting. Then he relocked the subdivision, and the safe itself, and put the keys away in his trousers and the packets in his coat-tail pockets, one in each, that they might not bulge suspiciously. Next he unbolted the door, and, returning, gave way to paroxysms of exultation too deep for words.

"At last," he said, stretching out his fat little fist towards the room where George was with Lady Bellamy, "at last, after twenty years of waiting, you are in my power, my lady. Time *has* brought its revenge, and if before you are forty-eight hours older you do not make acquaintance with a bitterness worse than death, then my name is not John Bellamy. I will repay you every jot, and with interest, too, my lady!"

Then he calmed himself, and, ringing a bell, told the servant to tell Lady Bellamy that he had walked on home. When, an hour and a half later, she reached Rewtham House, she found that her husband had been suddenly summoned to London on a matter of business.

That night in her desolation Angela cast herself upon the floor with outstretched arms and wept for her dead lover, and for the shame which overshadowed her. And the moon travelling up the sky, struck her, shining coldly on her snowy robe and rounded form—glinting on the gold of her loosed hair—flooding all the room with light: till the white floor gleamed like a silver shrine, and she lay there a weeping saint. Then she rose and crept to such rest as utter weariness of body and mind can give.

All that night, too, George Caresfoot paced, hungry-eyed, up and down, up and down the length of his great room, his gaze fixed on the windows which commanded Bratham, like that of some caged tiger on a desired prey.

"To-morrow," he kept muttering; till the first ray of the rising sun fell blood-red upon his wasted form, and then, bathing his thin hands in its beams, he sunk down exhausted, crying exultingly, "not to-morrow, but *to-day*."

That night Lady Bellamy sat at an open window, rising continually to turn her dark eyes upon the starry heavens above her.

"It is of no use," she said at last, "my knowledge fails me."

CHAPTER VII.

THE BRIDEGROOM.

THE arrangement for the morrow was that Angela and her father were to take a fly to Roxham, where the registry-office was, and whither George was also to be conveyed in a close carriage; that the ceremony was then to be gone through, after which the parties were to separate and return to their respective homes. Mr. Fraser had been asked to attend, but had excused himself from doing so.

In pursuance of this programme, Angela and her father left the Abbey House about ten o'clock and drove in silence to the town. Strange as it may seem, Angela had never been in a town before, and, in the curious condition of her mind, the new sight of busy streets interested her greatly, and served to divert her attention till they reached the door of the office. She alighted, and was shown with Philip into a waiting-room. And here, for some unexplained reason, a great fear took hold of her, a terror of this ceremony which now loomed large and life-like before her.

"Father," she said, suddenly, after a moment of irresolution, "I am going home. I will not go on with this business."

"What can you mean, Angela?"

"I mean what I say. I never realised how dreadful

it all was till now; it has come upon me like a revelation. Come, I am going."

"Angela, don't be a fool. You forget that George will be here in a minute, and that the settlements are all signed."

"Then he can go back again and the settlements can be torn up. I will not go on with it."

Philip was by this time almost beside himself with anxiety. After having thus with thought and toil, and by the aid of a blessed chance, lifted this delicious cup to his lips, was it to be dashed from him? Were the sweet dreams so near approaching to realisation, in which he had been wrapped for so many days, all to be dissipated into thin air? Was he to lose the land after all, after he had fingered—oh! how lovingly—the yellow title-deeds? For, alas! the sale depended on the marriage. It could not be; neither fate nor Angela could be so cruel. He turned upon her with the boldness of despair.

"Angela, you must not go on like this, after having agreed to the thing of your own free will. Think of what it involves for me. If you refuse to marry him now at the last moment, I shall lose the Isleworth estates. Heavens, to think that so much property should be dependent upon the mere whim of a girl! Cannot you have a little consideration for others beside yourself? Do you really mean to sacrifice the hopes of my whole life, to throw away the only opportunity I can ever have of righting my wrongs, in order to gratify a sentimental whim? For God's sake, think a little first before you sacrifice me. You promised to do it."

Never before had Angela seen her father so strongly excited; he was positively shaking with agitation. She

looked at him steadily, and with such contempt that, even in his excitement, he quailed before her.

"Very well, then, I will carry out my promise, dreadful as it is to me; but remember that it is only because you beg it, and that the responsibility of its consequences must always remain with you. Now, are you satisfied?—you will get your land."

Philip's dark face assumed a look of fervent gratitude, but before he had time to reply, a messenger came to say that "the gentleman" was waiting.

Her resolve once taken, Angela followed him with an untroubled face into the room where the registrar, a gentleman neatly dressed in black, was sitting at a sort of desk. Here the first thing her glance fell upon was the person of George Caresfoot. Although it was now the second week in June, he wore a respirator over his mouth and a scarf round his neck, and coughed very much. These were the first things she noticed. The next was that he was much thinner, so thin that the cheekbones stood quite out from the level of his face, whilst the little bloodshot eyes seemed to protrude, giving to his general appearance, even with the mouth (his worst feature) hidden by the respirator, an unusually repulsive look. He was leaning on the arm of Lady Belamy, who greeted Angela with a smile, which the latter fancied had something of triumph in it.

With the exception of the messenger, who played the part of clerk in this civil ceremony, there was nobody else in the room. No greetings were interchanged, and in another moment Angela was standing, dressed in her funeral black, by George's side before the registrar, and the ceremony had begun.

But from that moment, although her beautiful face

preserved its composure, she scarcely saw or heard anything of what was going on. It was as though all the streams of thought in her brain had burst their banks, and mingled in a great and turbulent current. She was filled with thought, but could seize upon no one idea, whilst within her mind she heard a sound as of the continuous whirring of broken machinery.

Objects and individuals, real and imagined, presented themselves before her mental vision, expanded till they filled the heavens with their bulk, and then shrank and shrank, and vanished into nothing. The word "wife" struck upon her ears, and seemed to go wailing away, "wife, wife, wife!" through all the illimitable halls of sound, till they were filled with echoes, and sound itself fell dead against the silence of the stars.

It was done. She awoke to find herself a married woman. Lady Bellamy stepped forward with the same half-triumphant smile with which she had greeted Angela hovering about her lips.

"Let me congratulate you, *Mrs.* Carefoot," she said; "indeed, I think I am privileged to do so, for, if I remember right, I was the first to prophesy this happy event;" and then, dropping her voice so that Angela alone could hear her, "Do you not remember that I told you that within nine months you would as certainly come to the altar-rails with George Carefoot as you would to your death-bed? I said that nine months ago to-day."

Angela started as though she had been stung.

"Events have been too strong for me," she murmured; "but all this is nothing but a form, a form that can now be forgotten."

Again Lady Bellamy smiled as she answered—

"Oh, of course, Mrs. Caresfoot, nothing but a form." Angela's eye fell upon the ring on her finger. She tore it off.

"Take this back," she said, "I have done with it."

"A married woman must wear a ring, Mrs. Caresfoot."

Angela threw it upon the floor.

Just then George and Philip returned from a little back-room where they had been with the registrar, who still remained behind, to sign the certificate. George advanced upon his wife with a dreadful smile on his features, removing the respirator as he came. His object was to kiss her, but she divined it and caught her father by the arm.

"Father," she said, "protect me from this man."

"Protect you, Angela; why, he is your husband!"

"My husband! Have you all agreed to drive me mad?"

Lady Bellamy saw that if something were not done quickly there would be a shocking scene, which was the last thing she wanted, so she seized George and whispered in his ear, after which he followed her sulkily, turning round from time to time to look at Angela.

On her way from Roxham, Lady Bellamy stopped her carriage at the telegraph office and went in and wrote a telegram.

"I respect that woman, and she shall have her chance," she said, as she re-read it previous to handing it to the clerk.

Three hours later Mildred Carr received the following message at Madeira:

"From A. B. to Mrs. Carr, Quinta Carr, Madeira:

"Angela C. married her cousin G. C. this morning."

That night Lady Bellamy dined at Isleworth with George Caresfoot. The dinner passed over in almost complete silence; George was evidently plunged in thought, and could not eat, though he drank a good deal. Lady Bellamy ate and thought too. After the servants had gone, she began to speak.

"I want my price, George," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. You are now Angela Caresfoot's husband; give me back those letters as you promised, I am impatient to break my chains." He hesitated. "George," she said, in a warning voice, "do not dare to play with me; I warn you that your power over me is not what it used to be. Give me back those letters. I have done your wicked work for you and will have my pay."

"All right, Anne, and so you shall; when will you have them?"

"Now, this instant."

"But I have not got my keys."

"You forget your keys are on your watch-chain."

"Ah, to be sure, so they are. You won't turn round on me when you get them, will you, Anne?"

"Why should I turn on you? I wish to get the letters, and, if I can, to have done with you."

He went with a somewhat hesitating step to the iron safe in the corner of the room and opened it. Then he opened the subdivision and rummaged about there for a while. At last he looked up.

"It is very curious, Anne," he said, in a half-frightened voice, "but I cannot find them."

"George, give me those letters."

"I can't find them, Anne, I can't find them. If you

don't believe me, come and look for yourself. Somebody must have taken them."

She advanced and did as he said. It was evident that the letters were not there.

"Once before when you were ill you hid them. Where have you hidden them now?"

"I haven't hidden them, Anne; I have not, indeed."

She turned slowly and looked him full in the eyes. Her own face was ashy pale with fury, but she said never a word. Her silence was more terrible than words. Then she raised her hands and covered her eyes for a while. Presently she dropped them, and, said, in a singularly soft voice—

"It is over now."

"What do you mean?" he asked, fearfully, for she terrified him.

"I mean a great deal, George Caresfoot. I mean that something has snapped the bond which bound me to you. I mean that I no longer fear you, that I have done with you. Use your letters, if you will, you can harm me no more; I have passed out of the region of your influence, out of the reach of your revenge. I look on you now and wonder what the link was between us, for there was a mysterious link. That I cannot tell. But this I can tell you. I have let go your hand, and you are going to fall down a great precipice, George, a precipice of which I cannot see the foot. Yes, it is right that you should cower before me now; I have cowered before you for more than twenty years. You made me what I am. I am going into the next room now till my carriage comes; I did not order it till half-past ten. Do not follow me. But before I go I will tell you something, and you know I do not make mistakes. You will never sleep under

this roof again, George Caresfoot, and we shall not meet again alive. You have had a long day, but your hour has struck."

"Who told you that, woman?" he asked, furiously.

"Last night I read it—in the stars; to-night I read it in your face."

And again she looked at him, long and steadily, as he crouched in the chair before her, and then slowly left the room.

After a while he roused himself, and began to drink wine furiously.

"Curse her!" he said, as the fumes mounted into his brain, "curse her! she is trying to frighten me with her infernal magic, but she sha'n't. I know what she is at; but I will be beforehand with her." And, staggering under the mingled influence of drink and excitement, he rose and left the house.

Lady Bellamy sat in the drawing-room, and waited for her carriage; at last she heard the wheels upon the gravel. Then she rose, and rapidly did something to the great lamp upon the paper-strewn table. As she shut the door she turned.

"That will do," she said.

In the hall she met the servant coming to announce the carriage.

"Is your master still in the dining-room?" she asked.

"No, my lady."

She laughed a little, and civilly bade the man good-night.

CHAPTER VIII.

AND THE BRIDE.

OUTSIDE the door of the registry-office, Angela and her father had to make their way through a crowd of small boys, who had by some means or other found out that a wedding was going on inside, and stood waiting there, animated by the intention of cheering the bride and the certain hope of sixpences. But when they saw Angela, her stately form robed in black, and her sweet face betraying the anguish of her mind, the sight shocked their sense of the fitness of things, and they slipped off without a word. Indeed, a butcher's boy, with a turn for expressive language, remarked in indignation to another of his craft so soon as they had recovered their spirits—

“Call that a weddin’, Bill; why, it’s more like a funeral with the plumes off; and as for the gal, though she’s a ‘clipper,’ her face was as pale as a ‘long un’s.’”

Angela never quite knew how she got back to the Abbey House. She only remembered that she was by herself in the fly, her father preferring to travel on the box alone with the coachman. Nor could she ever quite remember how she passed the remainder of that day. She was quite mazed. But at length it went, and the night came, and she was thankful for the night.

About nine o’clock she went up to her bedroom at the top of the house. It had served as a nursery for many generations of Caresfoots; indeed, during the last three centuries, hundreds of little feet had pattered over the old worm-eaten boards. But the little feet had long since gone to dust, and the only signs of children’s play

and merriment left about the place were the numberless scratches, nicks, and letters cut in the old panelling, and even on the beams which supported the low ceiling.

It was a lonesome chamber for a young girl, or, indeed, for anybody whose nerves were not of the strongest. Nobody slept upon that floor or in the rooms beneath it, Philip occupying a little closet which joined his study on the ground floor. All the other rooms were closed, and tenanted only by rats that made unearthly noises in their emptiness. As for Jakes and his wife, the only servants on the place, they occupied a room over the washhouse, which was separate from the main building. Angela was therefore practically alone in a great house, and might have been murdered a dozen times over without the fact being discovered for hours. This did not, however, trouble her much, simply because she paid no heed to the noises in the house, and was singularly free from fear of any kind.

On reaching her room, she sat down and began to think of Arthur, and, as she thought, her mind grew clearer and more at peace. Presently she took a Bible and read her nightly chapter, and then undressed and said her prayers, praying with unusual earnestness that it might please the Almighty in His wisdom to take her to where her lover was. Her prayers done, she rose, put on a white dressing wrapper, and, seating herself before the glass, unloosed her hair. Then she began to brush it, pausing presently to think how Arthur had admired its colour and the ripples on it. She had been much more careful of her hair since then, and smiled sadly to herself at her folly as she thought of it.

Thinking thus, she fell into a reverie, and sat so still that a great grey rat came noiselessly out of his hole in

a corner of the room, and, advancing into the circle of light round the dressing-table, sat up on his hind legs to see if he was alone. Suddenly he turned and scuttled back to his run in evident alarm, and at the same second Angela thought that she heard a sound of a different character from those she was accustomed to in the old house—a sound like the creaking of a boot. It passed, however, but left an indefinable dread creeping over her, and chilling the blood in her veins. She began to expect something, she knew not what, and was fascinated by the expectation. She would have risen to lock the door, but all strength seemed to have left her; she was paralysed by the near sense of evil. Then came a silence as intense as it was lonely.

It was a ghastly moment.

Her back was towards the doorway, for her dressing-table was immediately opposite the door, which was raised some four feet above the level of the landing, and approached by as many steps.

Gradually her eyes became riveted on the glass before her, for in it she thought that she saw the door move. Next second she was sure that it *was* moving, very slowly; the hinges took an age to turn. What could be behind it? At last it was open, and in the glass Angela saw framed in darkness *the head and shoulders of George Caresfoot*. At first she believed that her mind deceived her, that it was an apparition. No, there was no mistake. But the respirator, the hollow cough and decrepitude of the morning—where are they?

With horror in her heart, she turned and faced him. Seeing that he was observed, he staggered into the room with a step which was half drunken and half jaunty, but which belied the conflict of passions written on his brow.

He spoke—his voice sounded hoarse and hollow, and was ill-tuned to his words.

“You did not expect me perhaps—wonder how I got here! Jakes let me in; he has a proper respect for marital rights, has Jakes. You looked so pretty, I could not make up my mind to disturb you. Quite a romantic meeting, is it not?”

“You are a dying man. How did you come here?”

“Dying! my dear wife; not a bit of it. I am no more dying than you are. I have been ill, it is true, but that is because you have fretted me so. The dying was only a little ruse to get your consent. All is fair in love and war, you know; and of course you never really believed in that precious agreement. That was nothing but a bit of maidenly shyness, eh?”

Angela stood still as stone, a look of horror on her face.

“Then you don’t know what you have cost me. Your father’s price was a hundred and fifty thousand! at least that is what it came to, the old shark! It isn’t every man who would come down like that for a girl, now is it? It shows a generous mind, doesn’t it?”

Still she uttered not a syllable.

“Angela,” he said, changing his tone to one of hoarse earnestness, “don’t look at me like that, because, even if you are a bit put out at the trick I have played you, just think it was because I loved you so, Angela. I couldn’t help it, I couldn’t really. It is not every man who would go through all that I have suffered for you; it is no joke to sham consumption for three months, I can tell you; but we will have many a laugh over that. Why don’t you answer me, instead of standing there just like the Andromeda in my study?”

The simile was an apt one, the statue of the girl

awaiting her awful fate wore the same hopeless, helpless look of vacant terror which was upon Angela's face now. But its mention recalled Lady Bellamy and the ominous incident in which that statue had figured, and he hastened to drown recollection in action.

"Come," he said, "you will forgive me, won't you? It was all done for love of you." And he moved towards her.

As he came she seemed to collect her energies; the fear left her face, and in its stead there shone a great and awful blaze of indignation.

Her brush was still in her hand, and as he drew near she dashed it full into his face. It was but a light thing, and only staggered him, but it gave her time to pass him, and reach the still open door. Barefooted, she fled like the wind down the passages, and down the stairs. Uttering an oath, he followed her. But, as she went, she remembered that she could not run upon the gravel with her naked feet, and, with this in her mind, she turned to bay by a large window that gave light to the first-floor landing, immediately opposite which was the portrait of "Devil" Caresfoot. It was unbolted, and with a single movement of the hand she flung it open, and stood panting by it in the full light of the moon. In another moment he was upon her, furious at the blow, and his face contorted with passion.

"Stop," she cried, "and listen to me. Before I will allow you to touch me with a single finger, I will spring from here. I would rather thrust myself into the hands of Providence than into yours, monster and perjured liar that you are!"

He stopped as she bade him, and commenced to pace round and round her in a semicircle, glaring at her with wild eyes.

"If you jump from there," he said, "you will only break your limbs; it is not high enough to kill you. You are my wife, don't you understand? You are my legal wife. The law is on my side. No one can help you, no one; you are mine in the sight of the whole world."

"But not yours in the sight of God. It is to Him that I now appeal. Get back!"

She stretched out her arm, and with her long hair glimmering in the moonlight, her white robes, and the anger on her face, looked like some avenging angel driving a fiend to hell. He shrank away before her, and there came a pause, and save for their heavy breathing, stillness fell again upon the house, whilst in the half light the picture that hung above them seemed to follow them with its fierce eyes, as though it were a living thing.

The landing where they stood looked upon the hall below, at the end of which was Philip's study. Suddenly its door burst open, and Philip himself passed through it, grasping a candlestick in one hand and some parchments in the other. His features were dreadful to see, resembling those of a dumb thing in torture; his eyes protruded, his livid lips moved, but no sound came from them. He staggered across the hall with terror staring from his face.

"Father, father!" called Angela; but he took no notice—he did not even seem to hear.

Presently they heard the candlestick thrown with a clash upon the hall pavement, then the front door slammed, and he was gone, and at that moment a great ruddy glow shot up the western sky, then a tongue of flame, then another and another.

"See!" said Angela, with a solemn laugh, "I did not appeal for help in vain."

Isleworth Hall was in flames!

CHAPTER IX.

MY DARLING! MY DARLING!

ARTHUR did not delay his departure from Madeira. The morning following Mildred's ball he embarked on board a Portuguese boat, a very dirty craft which smelt of garlic and rancid oil, and sailed for Lisbon. He arrived there safely, and mooned about that city for a while, himself a monument of serious reflections, and then struck across into Spain, where he spent a month or so inspecting the historical beauties of that fallen country. Thence he penetrated across the Pyrenees into Southern France, which was pleasant in the spring months. Here he remained another month, meeting with no adventures worthy of any note, and improving his knowledge of the French language. Tiring at last of this, he travelled to Paris, and went to the theatres, but found his own thoughts too absorbing to allow of his taking any keen interest in their sensationalisms; so, after a brief stay, he made his way up to Brittany and Normandy, and went in for inspecting old castles and cathedrals, and finally ended up his continental travels by spending a week on the island rock of Saint Michel.

This place pleased him more than any he had visited. He liked to wander about among the massive granite pillars of that noble ecclesiastical fortress, and at night to watch the phosphoric tide come rushing in with all the speed of a race-horse, over the wide sands which separate it from the mainland. There the thirty-first day of May found him, and he bethought him that it was time to return to London and see about getting the settlements drawn and ordering the wedding bouquet. To speak the

truth, he thought more about the bouquet than the settlements.

He arrived in London on the first of June, and went to see his family lawyer, a certain Mr. Borley, who had been solicitor to the trust during his minority.

"Bless me, Heigham, how like your father you have grown!" said that legal gentleman, as soon as Arthur was ensconced in the clients' chair—a chair that, had it been endowed with the gift of speech, could have told some surprising stories. "It seems only the other day that he was sitting there dictating the terms of his will, and yet that was before the Crimean war, more than twenty years ago. Well, my boy, what is it?"

Arthur, thus encouraged, entered into a rather blundering recital of the circumstances of his engagement.

Mr. Borley did not say much; but, from his manner and occasional comments, it was evident that he considered the whole story very odd—regarding it, indeed, with some suspicion.

"I must tell you frankly, Heigham," he said, at last, "I don't quite understand this business. The young lady, no doubt, is charming—young ladies, looking at them from my clients' point of view, always are—but I can't say I like your story about her father. Why did you not tell me all this before? I might then have been able to give you some advice worth having, or, at any rate, to make a few confidential"—he laid great emphasis on the word "confidential"—"inquiries."

Arthur replied that it had not occurred to him to do so.

"Umph, pity—great pity; but there is no time for that sort of thing now, if you think you are going to get married on the tenth; so I suppose the only thing to do

is to go through with it and await the upshot. What do you wish done?"

Arthur explained his views, which apparently included settling all his property on his bride in the most absolute fashion possible. To this Mr. Borley forcibly objected, and in the end Arthur had to give way and make such arrangements as the old gentleman thought proper—arrangements differing considerably from those proposed by himself.

This interview over, he had other and pleasanter duties to perform, such as ordering his wedding clothes, making arrangements with a florist for the bridal bouquet, and last, but not least, having his mother's diamonds reset as a present for his bride.

But still the days went very slowly, there seemed to be no end to them. He had no relations to go and see, and in his present anxious excited state he preferred to avoid his friends and club acquaintances. Fifth, sixth, seventh; never did a schoolboy await the coming of the day that marked the advent of his holidays with such intense anxiety.

At length the eighth of June arrived. Months before, he had settled what his programme should be on that day. His promise, as the reader may remember, forbade him to see Angela till the ninth, that is, at any hour after twelve on the night of the eighth, or, practically, as early as possible on the following morning. Now the earliest train would not get him down to Roxham till eleven o'clock, which would involve a wicked waste of four or five hours of daylight that might be spent with Angela, so he wisely resolved to start on the evening of the eighth, by a train leaving Paddington at six o'clock, and reaching Roxham at nine.

The day he spent in signing the settlements, finally interviewing the florist, and giving him directions as to forwarding the wedding-bouquet, which was to be composed of orange-blossoms, lilies of the valley, and stephanotis, and in getting the marriage-licence. But, notwithstanding these manifold employments, he managed to be three-quarters of an hour before his train, the longest forty-five minutes he ever spent.

He had written to the proprietor of the inn at Rewtham, where he had slept a year ago the night after he had left Isleworth, to send a gig to meet him at the station, and, on arriving at Roxham, a porter told him that a trap was waiting for him. On emerging from the station, even in the darkness, he was able to recognise the outlines of the identical vehicle which had conveyed him to the Abbey House some thirteen months ago, whilst the sound of an ancient, quavering voice informed him that the Jehu was likewise the same. His luggage was soon bundled up behind, and the steady-going old nag departed into the darkness.

"Well, Sam, do you remember me?"

"Well, no, sir, I can't rightly say how as I do: wait a bit; bean't you the gemman as travels in the dry line, and as I seed a-kissing the chambermaid?"

"No, I don't travel at present, and I have not kissed a chambermaid for some time. Do you remember driving a gentleman over to the Abbey House a year or so ago?"

"Why, yes, in course I does. Lord, now, and be you he? and we seed old Devil Caresfoot's granddaughter. Ah! many's the time that he has damned me, and all so soft and pleasant like; but it was his eyes that did the trick. They was awful, just awful; and you gave me

half-a-crown, you did. But somehow I thought I heard summat about you, sir, but I can't rightly remember what it be, my head not being so good as it used to."

"Perhaps you heard that I was going to be married?"

"No, I don't think how as it was that neither."

"Well, never mind me; have you seen Miss Caresfoot—the young lady you saw the day you drove me to the Abbey House—anywhere about lately?"

Arthur waited for the old man's lingering answer with all his heart upon his lips.

"Lor', yes, sir, that I have: I saw her this morning driving through the Roxham market-place."

"And how did she look?"

"A bit pale, I thought, sir; but well enough, and wonnerful handsome."

Arthur gave a sigh of relief. He felt like a man who has just come scatheless through some horrible crisis, and once more knows the sweet sensation of safety. What a load the old man's words had lifted from his mind? In his active imagination he had pictured all sorts of evils which might have happened to Angela during his year of absence. Lovers are always prone to such imaginings, and not altogether without reason, for there would seem to be a special power of evil that devotes itself to the derangement of their affairs and the ingenious disappointment of their hopes. But now the vague dread was gone, Angela was not spirited away or dead, and to know her alive was to know her faithful.

As they drove along, the old ostler continued to volunteer various scraps of information which fell upon his ears unheeded, till presently his attention was caught by the name Caresfoot.

"What about him?" he asked, quickly.

"He be a-dying, they do say."

"Which of them?"

"Why, the red-haired one, him as lives up at the Hall yonder."

"Poor fellow!" said Arthur, feeling quite fond of George in his happiness.

They had by this time reached the inn, where he had some supper, for old Sam's good news had brought back his appetite, which of late had not been quite up to par, and then went straight to his room that faced towards the Abbey House. It was, he noticed, the same in which he had slept the year before, and looking at the bed he remembered his dream, and smiled as he thought that the wood was passed, and before him lay nothing but the flowery meadows. Mildred Carr, too, crossed his mind, but of her he did not think much, not that he was by any means heartless—indeed, what had happened had pained him acutely, the more so because his own conscience told him he had been a fool. He was very sorry, but love being here below one of the most selfish of the passions, he had not time to be sorry just then.

For just on the horizon he could distinguish a dense mass which was the trees surrounding the Abbey House, and between the trees there glimmered a faint light which might proceed from some rising star, or from Angela's window. He preferred to believe it was the latter. The propinquity made him very happy. What was she doing? he wondered—sitting by her window and thinking of him! He would ask her on the morrow. It was worth while going through that year of separation in order to taste the joy of meeting. It seemed like a dream to think that within six-and-thirty hours he would

probably be Angela's husband, and how nobody in the world would be able to take her away from him. He stretched out his arms towards her.

"My darling, my darling!" he cried aloud into the still night. "My darling, my darling!" the echo answered sadly.

CHAPTER X.

YOU MISERABLE WOMAN!

THAT night Arthur dreamed no evil dreams, but he thought he heard a sound outside his door, and some one speak of fire. Hearing nothing more, he turned and went to sleep again. Waking in the early dawn he felt, ere yet his senses fully came, a happy sense of something, he knew not what, a rosy shadow of coming joy, such as will, only with more intensity, fall upon our quickened faculties when, death ended, our souls begin to stir as we awaken to Eternity.

He sprang from his bed, and his eye fell on a morocco case upon the dressing-table. It contained the diamonds which he had had re-set as a wedding present to Angela. They were nothing compared with Mildred Carr's, but still extremely handsome, their beauty being enhanced by the elegance of the setting, which was in the shape of a snake with emerald head and ruby eyes, so constructed as to clasp tightly round Angela's shapely throat.

The sight of the jewellery at once recalled his present circumstances, and he knew that the long hour of trial was passed—he was about to meet Angela. Having dressed himself as quickly as he could, he took up the jewel-case, but, finding it too large to carry, he opened

it, and, taking out the necklace, crammed it into his pocket. Thus armed he slipped down the stairs, past the open common room where through the cracks in the shutters the light shone on a dismal array of sticky beer-mugs and spirit glasses, down the sanded passage into the village street.

It was full daylight now, and the sun never looked upon a lovelier morning. The air was warm, but there was that sharp freshness in it which is needful to make summer weather perfect, and which we always miss by breakfasting at nine o'clock. The sky was blue, just flecked with little clouds; the dewdrops sparkled upon every leaf and blade of grass; touches of mist clung about the hollows, and the sweet breath of the awakened earth was full of the perfect scent of an English June, which is in its way even more delicious than the spicy odours of the tropics. It was a morning to make sick men well, sad men happy, and atheists believers in a creative hand. How much more then did it fire Arthur's pulses, already bounding with youth and health, with an untold joy!

He felt like a child again, so free from care, so happy, except that his heart swelled with a love beyond the knowledge of children. His quick temperament had rebounded from the depths of unequal depression, into which it so often fell, to the heights of a happy assurance. The Tantalus cup was at his lips at last, and he would drink his full, be sure! His eyes flashed and sparkled, his foot fell light and quick as an antelope's, his brown cheek glowed—never had he looked so handsome. Angela would not forget her promise; she would be waiting for him by the lake, he was sure of that, and thither he

made his way through the morning sunshine. They were happy moments.

Presently he passed into the parish of Bratham, and his eye fell upon a neat red brick cottage, a garden planted with sunflowers, hollyhocks, and sweet annunciation lilies, now breaking into bloom, and a bright gravel path running to the rustic gate. He thought the garden charmingly old-fashioned, and had just entered a mental note to ask Angela who lived there, when the door opened, and a figure he knew emerged, bearing a mat in one hand and a mop-stick in the other. He was some way off, and at first could not quite distinguish who it was; but before she had come to the gate he recognised Pigott. By this time she had stepped into the road, and was making elaborate preparations to dust her mat, so that she did not see him till he spoke to her.

"How are you, Pigott? What may you be doing down here? Why are you not up at the Abbey?"

She gave a cry, and the mat and the mop-stick fell from her hands.

"Mr. Heigham!" she said, in an awed voice that chilled his blood, "what has brought you back, and why do you come to me? I never wronged you."

"What are you talking about? I have come to marry Angela, of course. We are going to be married to-morrow."

"Oh, then it's really *you*, sir! *And she married yesterday—oh, good God!*"

"Don't laugh at me, nurse—please don't laugh. It—it upsets me. Why do you shake so? What do you mean?"

"Mean!—I mean that my Angela *married her cousin, George Caresfoot, at Roxham, yesterday*. Heaven forgive me for having to tell it you!"

Reader, have you ever mortally wounded a head of large game? You hear your bullet thud upon the living flesh, and see the creature throw up its head and stagger for a moment, and then plunge forward with desperate speed, crashing through bush and reeds as though they were meadow-grass. Follow him awhile, and you will find him standing quite still, breathing in great sighs, his back humped and his eye dim, the gore trickling from his nostrils. He is dying—but be careful, he means mischief before he dies.

Any great shock, mental or physical, is apt to reduce even civilised man to the level of his brother beasts. Arthur, for instance, behaved very much like a wounded buffalo as soon as the stun of the blow passed away, and the rending pain began to make itself felt. For a few seconds he gazed before him stupid and helpless, then his face turned quite grey, the eyes and nostrils gaped wide, and a curious rigidity took possession of his muscles.

The road he was following led to a branching lane, the same that Angela was turning up that misty Christmas Eve when she saw Lady Bellamy glide past in her carriage. This lane, to judge from its numerous curves, had in former ages, no doubt, been an ancient forest-path, and it ran to the little bridge over the stream that fed the lake—a point that, by travelling as the crow flies from Pigott's cottage, might be reached in half the time. This fact Arthur seemed at that dreadful moment suddenly to realise, more probably from natural instinct than from any particular knowledge of the lay of the land. He did not speak again to Pigott, and she was too frightened at his face to speak to him. He only looked at her, but she never forgot that look as long as she

lived. Then he turned like a mad thing, and went *crash* through the thick fence that hedged the road, and ran at full speed towards the lake, diverging neither to the right nor to the left, but breaking his way without the slightest apparent difficulty through everything that opposed him.

Very soon he came to the little bridge, and here, struck by some new instinct, he halted. He did not appear to be out of breath, but he leaned on the rail of the bridge and groaned like a dying man. His ghastly face made a blot in the mimic scenery of the place, which was really pretty. The bridge commanded no view, for the little creek it spanned, and into which the stream ran, gave a turn before it grew into the neck of the lake; but it was hedged in by greenery, and the still pool beneath it was starred with water-lilies, turning their innocent eyes up to the blue sky, and looking as peaceful as though there were no stormy winds or waters in the world to toss them. Amongst these water-lilies a moorhen had built her nest, and presently she came clucking out right under Arthur's feet, followed by ten or a dozen little hurrying black balls, each tipped with sealing-wax red. She looked very happy with her brood—as happy as the lilies and the blue sky—and the sight made him savage. He took up a large stone that lay by him and threw it at her. It hit her on the back and killed her, and Arthur laughed aloud as he watched her struggle, and then lie still, while the motherless chicks hurried frightened away. And yet since he was a boy till now he had never wantonly injured any living creature.

Presently, the dead water-hen floated out of sight, and he roused himself, straightened his clothes, which had been somewhat torn and deranged, and, with a steady

step and a fixed smile upon his lips, went forward, no longer at a run, but walking quietly up the path that led to the big oak and shaded glen. In five minutes he was there.

Again he paused and looked. There was something to see. On one of the stone seats, dressed in black, her face deathly pale, her head resting on her hand, and trouble in her eyes, sat Angela. On the other was her constant companion, the dog which he had given her. He remembered how, a little more than a year before, she had surprised him in the same way, and he had looked upon her and loved her. He could even smile at the strange irony of fate that under such curiously reversed circumstances, had brought him back to surprise her, to look upon her, and hate her.

She moved uneasily, and glanced round, but he was hidden by a bush. Then she half rose, paused irresolutely, and, as though struggling against something foolish, sat determinedly down again. When Arthur had done smiling, he came forward a few steps into the open, feeling that his face was all drawn and changed, as indeed it was. It was the face of a man of fifty. His eyes were fire, and his heart was ice.

She turned her head, and looked up with a shrinking in her eyes, as though she feared to see something hateful—a shrinking which turned first to wonder, then to dread, then to a lively joy, and then again to awe. She rose mechanically, with a great gasp; her lips parted, as though to speak, but no words came. The dog, too, saw him, and growled, then ran up and sniffed, and leaped upon him with a yelp of joy. He waved it down, and there was something in the gesture that frightened the

beast. It shrank behind him. Then he spoke in a clear, hard tone—not his own voice, she thought.

“Angela, is this true? Are you *married*?”

“Oh, no;” and her voice came stealing to his senses like half-forgotten music; “that is, yes, alas! But is it really you? Oh, Arthur, my darling, have you come back to me?” and she moved towards him with outstretched arms.

Already they were closing round him, and he could feel her breath upon his cheek, when the charm broke, and he wrenched himself free.

“Get back; do not dare to touch me! Do you know what you are? The poor lost girl is not fallen so low as you. She must get her bread; but, at any rate, I could have given you bread. What! fresh from your husband’s arms, and ready to throw yourself into mine! Shame upon you! Were you not married yesterday?”

“Oh, Arthur, have pity! You do not understand. Oh, merciful God——”

“Have pity! What need for pity? Where you not married yesterday?” and he laughed bitterly. “I come—I come from far to congratulate the new-made wife. It is a little odd, though, I thought to marry you myself. See, here was my wedding present;” and he tore the diamond necklace from his pocket. “A snake, you see; a good emblem! Away with it, its use is gone!”

The diamonds went flashing through the sunlight, and fell with a little splash into the lake.

“What! are you not sorry to see so much valuable property wasted? You have a keen appreciation of property!”

Angela sank down on her knees before him, like a broken lily. Her looks grew faint and despairing. The

stately head bowed itself to his feet, and all the golden weight of hair broke loose. But he did not pause or spare her. He ground his teeth. No one could have recognised in this maddened, passion-inspired man the pleasant, easy-tempered Arthur of an hour before. His nature was stirred to its depths, and they were deep.

“You miserable woman! do not kneel to me. If it were not unmanly, I could spurn you with my foot. Do you know, girl, you who swore to love me till time had passed—yes, and for all eternity; you who do love me at this moment—and therein lies your shame—that you have killed me? You have murdered my heart. I trusted you, Angela, I trusted you, I gave you all my life, all that was best in me; and now in reward—degraded as you are—I must always love you as much as I despise you. Even now I feel that I *cannot* hate you and forget you. I *must* love you, and I *must* despise you.”

She gazed up at him like a dumb beast at its butcher; she could not speak, her voice had gone.

“And yet, when I think of it, I have something to thank you for. You have cleared my mind of illusions. You have taught me what a woman’s purity is worth. You did the thing well, too! You did not crush me by inches with platitudes, bidding me forget you and not think of you any more, as though forgetfulness were possible, and thought a tangible thing that one could kill. You struck home in silence, once and for all. Thank you for *that*, Angela. What, are you crying? Go back to the brute whom you have chosen, the brute whose passion or whose money you could prefer to me, tell him that they are tears of happiness, and let him kiss them quite away.”

"Oh, Arthur—cruel—Arthur!" and nature gave way. She fell fainting on the grass.

Then, when he saw that she could not understand or feel any more, his rage died, and he too broke down and sobbed, great, gasping sobs. And the frightened dog crept up and licked first her face and then his hand.

Kneeling down, Arthur raised her in his arms and strained her to his heart, kissing her thrice upon the forehead—the lips he could not touch. Then he placed her on the seat, leaning her weight against the tree, and motioning back the dog, he went his way.

CHAPTER XI.

BETRAYED!

ARTHUR took the same path by which he had come—all paths were alike to him now—but before he had gone ten yards he saw the figure of George Caresfoot, who appeared to have been watching him. In George's hand was a riding-whip, for he had ridden from the scene of the fire, and was all begrimed with smoke and dirt. But this Arthur did not notice.

"Hullo," he began; "what——" and then he hesitated; there was a look in Arthur's eyes which he did not like.

But, if George hesitated, Arthur did not. He sprang at him like a wild cat, and in a second had him by the throat and shoulder. For a moment he held him there, for in his state of compressed fury George was like a child in his hands. And as he held him a fierce and almost uncontrollable desire took possession of him to kill this man, to throw him down and stamp the life out of

him. He conquered it, however, and loosed the grip on his throat.

"Let me go!" shrieked George, as soon as he could get breath.

Arthur cut short his clamours by again compressing his windpipe.

"Listen!" he said; "a second ago I was very near killing you, but I remember now that, after all, it is she, not you, who are chiefly to blame. You only followed your brutal nature, and nothing else can be expected of a brute. Very likely you put pressure on her, like the cad that you are, but that does not excuse her, for, if she could not resist pressure, she is a fool in addition to being what she is. I look at you and think that soon *she* will come down to *your* level, the level of my successful rival. To be mated to a man like you would drag an angel down. That will be punishment enough. Now go, you cur!"

He swung him violently from him. His fall was broken by a bramble-bush. It was not exactly a bed of roses, but George thought it safer to lie there till his assailant's footsteps had grown faint—he did not wish to bring him back again. Then he crept out of the bush smarting all over. Indeed, his frame of mind was altogether not of the most amiable. To begin with, he had just seen his house entirely burnt down, which, as luck would have it, was the only thing he had not sold to Philip, and which was also at the moment uninsured, owing to the confusion arising from the transfer of the property. All its valuable contents too were irretrievably destroyed, including a fine collection of pictures and private papers he by no means wished to lose.

Nor was his mood improved by the recollection of

the events of the previous night, or by the episode of the bramble-bush, illuminated as it was by Arthur's vigorous language; or by what he had just witnessed, for he had arrived in time to see, though from a distance, the last act of the interview between Arthur and Angela.

He had seen him lift her in his arms, kiss her, and place her on the stone seat, but he did not know that she had fainted. The sight had roused his evil passions until they raged like the fire he had left. Then Arthur came out upon him and he made acquaintance with the bramble-bush as already described. But he was not going to be cheated out of his revenge; the woman was still left for him to wreak it on.

By the time he reached Angela, her faculties were re-awakening; but, though insensibility had yielded, sense had not returned. She sat upon the stone seat, upright indeed, but rigid and grasping its angles with her hands. The dog had gone. In the undecided way common to dogs, when two people to whom they are equally attached separate, it had at that moment taken it into its head to run a little way after Arthur.

George marched straight up to her, livid with fury.

"So this is how you go on when your husband is away, is it? I saw you kissing that young blackguard, though I am not good enough for you. What, won't you answer? Then it is time that I taught you obedience."

"Swish!" went the heavy whip through the air, and fell across her fair cheek.

"Will that wake you up, eh, or must I repeat the dose?"

The pain of the blow seemed to rouse her. She rose, her loosed hair falling round her like a golden fleece, and a broad blue stripe across her ghastly face. She

stretched out her hands; she opened her great eyes, and in them blazed the awful light of madness.

He was standing whip in hand, with his back to the lake; she faced him, a breathing, beautiful vengeance, and in a whisper so intense that the air was full of it, commenced a rambling prayer.

"Oh, God," she said, "bless my dear Arthur! Oh, Almighty Father, avenge our wrongs!"

She paused and fixed her eyes upon him, and they held him so that he could not stir. Then, in strange contrast to the hissing whisper, there broke from her lips a ringing and unearthly laugh that chilled him to the marrow. So they stood for some seconds.

The sound of angry voices had brought the bulldog back at full speed, and, at the sight of George's threatening attitude, it halted. It had always hated him, and now it straightway grew more like a devil than a dog. The innate fierceness of the great brute awoke; it bristled with fury till each separate hair stood on end, the eyes grew inflamed and rolled, the muscles stood out in knots against the skin, and saliva ran from its twitching jaws.

George did not know that it was near him, but Angela's wild eye fell upon it. Slowly raising her hand, she pointed at it.

"Look behind you," she cried.

The sound of her voice broke the spell that was upon him.

"Come, give me no more of your nonsense," he said, and then as much from vague fear and rampant brutality as from any other reason, again struck her with the whip.

Next second he was aware of a tremendous shock. The dog had seen the blow, and with all the blind courage of its race, had instantly launched itself straight

at the striker's throat. It missed its aim, however, only carrying away a portion of George's under-lip. He yelled with pain, and struck at it with the whip, and then began a scene which, in its grotesque horror, beggars all description. Again and again the dog flew at him, its perfect silence contrasting strangely with George's shrieks of terror, and the shrill peals of horrible laughter that came hurrying from Angela's lips as she watched the struggle.

At last the dog gripped the man by the forearm, and, sinking its great teeth into the flesh, hung its weight upon it. In vain did George, maddened by the exquisite pain, dash himself and the dog against the ground: in vain did he stagger round and round the glen, tearing at its throat with his uninjured hand. The brute hung grimly on. Presently there came an end. As he reeled along, howling for help and dragging his fierce burden with him, George stumbled over a dead bough which lay upon the bank of the lake, and fell backwards into the water, exactly at the spot where the foundations of the old boat-house wall rose to within a few inches of the surface. His head struck heavily against the stonework, and he and the dog, who would not loose his grip, lay on it for a moment. Then they rolled off together into the deep pool, the man dragging the dog with him. There were a few ripples, stained with little red filaments, a few air-bubbles that marked the exhalation of his last breath, and George's spirit had left its enclosing body, and gone—whither? Ay, whither had it gone?

The outcry brought Philip and old Jakes running down to the lake. They found Angela standing alone on the brink and laughing her wildest.

"See," she cried, as they came panting up, "the

bridegroom cometh from his chamber!" and at that moment some unreleased air within the body brought it up for an instant to the surface, so that the torn and ghastly face and head emerged for a second as though to look at them. Then it sank again.

"The brave dog holds him well—ha, ha, ha! He cannot catch me now—ha, ha, ha! Nor you, Judas, who sold me. Judas! Judas! Judas!" and, turning, she fled with the speed of the wind.

Mr. Fraser had but just come down, and was walking in his garden, when he saw this dreadful figure come flying towards him with streaming hair.

"*Betrayed!*" she cried, in a voice which rang like the wail of a lost soul, and fell on her face at his feet.

When she came back to life they found that she was mad.

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN BELLAMY, GOOD-BYE.

THE news of George Caresfoot's tragic death was soon common property, and following as it did so hard upon his marriage, which now was becoming known, and within a few hours of the destruction of his house by fire, it caused no little excitement. It cannot be said that the general feeling was one of very great regret; it was not. George Caresfoot had commanded deference as a rich man, but he certainly had not won affection. Still his fate excited general interest and sympathy, though some people were louder in their regrets over the death of such a plucky dog as Aleck, than over that of the man he killed, but then these had a personal dislike of George. When, however, it came to be rumoured that

the dog had attacked George because George had struck the dog's mistress, general sympathy veered decidedly towards the dog. By-and-by, as some of the true facts of the case came out, namely, that Angela Caresfoot had gone mad, that her lover, who was supposed to be dead, had been seen in Rewtham on the evening of the wedding, that the news of Mr. Heigham's death had been concocted to bring about the marriage, and last, but not least, that the Isleworth estates had passed into the possession of Philip Caresfoot, public opinion grew very excited, and the dog Aleck was well spoken of.

When Sir John Bellamy stepped out on the platform at Roxham on his return from London that day, his practised eye saw at once that something unusual had occurred. A group of county magistrates returning from quarter sessions were talking excitedly together whilst waiting for their train. He knew them all well, but at first they seemed inclined to let him pass without speaking to him. Presently, however, one of them turned, and addressed him.

"Have you heard about this, Bellamy?"

"No; what?"

"George Caresfoot is dead; killed by a bulldog, or something. They say he was thrashing the girl he married yesterday, his cousin's daughter, with a whip, and the dog made for him, and they both fell into the water together and were drowned. The girl has gone mad."

"Good heavens, you don't say so!"

"Yes, I do, though; and I'll tell you what it is, Bellamy, they say that you and your wife went to Madeira and trumped up a story about her lover's death in order to take the girl in. I tell you this as an old friend."

"What? I certainly went to Madeira, and I saw young

Heigham there, but I never trumped up any story about his death. I never mentioned him to Angela Caresfoot for two reasons, first, because I have not come across her, and secondly, because I understood that Philip Caresfoot did not wish it."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it, for your sake; but I have just seen Fraser, and he tells me that Lady Bellamy told the girl of this young Heigham's death in his own presence, and, what is more, he showed me a letter they found in her dress purporting to have been written by him on his death-bed which your wife gave her."

"Of what Lady Bellamy has or has not said or done, I know nothing. I have no control over her actions."

"Well, I should advise you to look into the business, because it will all come out at the inquest," and they separated.

Sir John drove homewards, thoughtful, but by no means unhappy. The news of George's agonising death was balm to him, he only regretted that he had not been there to see it—somewhere well out of the way of the dog; up a tree, for instance.

As soon as he got home, he sent a message to Lady Bellamy to say he wished to speak to her. Then he seated himself at his writing-desk, and waited. Presently he heard his wife's firm step upon the stairs. He rubbed his dry hands, and smiled a half frightened, wicked little smile.

"At last," he said. "And now for revenge."

She entered the room, looking rather pale, but calm and commanding as ever.

"So you have come back," she said.

"Yes. Have you heard the news? *Your lover*, George Caresfoot, is dead."

"I knew that he was dead. How did he die?"

"Who told you he was dead?"

"No one, I knew it; I told him he would die last night, and I felt him die this morning. Did she kill him or did Arthur Heigham?"

"Neither, that bulldog flew at him and he fell into the lake."

"Oh, I suppose Angela set it on. I told him that she would win. You remember the picture falling in the study at Isleworth. It has been a true omen, you see."

"Angela is mad. The story is all over the country and travelling like wild-fire. The letter you forged has been found. Heigham was down here this morning and has gone again, and you, Lady Bellamy, are a disgraced and ruined woman."

She did not flinch a muscle.

"I know it, it is the result of pitting myself against that girl; but pray, Sir John, what are you? Was it not you who devised the scheme?"

"You are right, I did, to trap two fools. Anne, I have waited twenty years, but you have met your master at last."

Lady Bellamy made a slight exclamation and relapsed into silence.

"My plot has worked well. Already one of you is dead, and for you a fate is reserved that is worse than death. You are henceforth a penniless outcast, left at forty-two to the tender mercies of the wide world."

"Explain yourself a little."

"With pleasure. For years I have submitted to your contumely, longing to be revenged, waiting to be revenged. You thought me a fool, I know, and compared with you I am; but you do not understand what an amount of hatred

even a fool is capable of. For twenty years, Lady Bellamy, I have hated you; you will never know how much, though perhaps what I am going to say may give you some idea. I very well knew what terms you were on with George Caresfoot, you never took any pains to hide them from me, you only hid the proofs. I soon discovered indeed that your marriage to me was nothing but a blind, that I was being used as a screen, forsooth. But your past I could never fathom. I don't look like a revengeful man, do I? But for all that I have for years sought many ways to ruin you both, yet from one thing and another they all failed, till a blessed chance made that brute's blind passion the instrument of his own destruction, and put you into my hands. You little thought when you told me all that story, and begged my advice, how I was revelling in the sense that, proud woman as you are, it must have been an agony of humiliation to you to have to tell it. It was an instructive scene, it assured me of what I suspected before, that George Caresfoot must have you bound to him by some stronger ties than those of affection, that he must hold you in a grip of iron. It made me think, too, that if by any means I could acquire the same power, I too should be able to torture you."

For the first time Lady Bellamy looked up.

"Am I tiring you," he said, politely, "or shall I go on?"

"Go on."

"With your permission, I will ring for a glass of sherry—no, claret, the day is too hot for sherry," and he rang.

The claret was brought and he drank a glass, remarking with an affectation of coolness that it was a sound wine for a pound a dozen; then he proceeded.

"The first thing I have to call your attention to is

this Arthur Heigham plot. At first it may appear that I am involved with you; I am not. There is not, now that George Caresfoot is dead, one tittle of evidence against me except your own, and who will believe *you*? You are inculpated up to the eyes; you delivered the forged letter, I can prove that you cozened the ring out of Heigham, and you told Philip: there is no escape for you, and I have already taken an opportunity to renounce any responsibility for your acts. At the inquest I shall appear to give evidence against you, and then I shall abandon you to your fate."

"Is that all?"

"No, woman. *I have your letters!*"

She sprang up with a little scream and stood over him with dilated eyes. Sir John leaned back in his chair, rubbed his hands, and watched her tortured face with evident satisfaction.

"Yes, you may well scream," he said, "for I not only possess them, but I have read and re-read them. I know all your story, the name of the husband you deserted and of the child who died of your neglect. I have even sent an agent to identify the localities. Yes, you may well scream, for I have read them all, and really they are most destructive documents, and romantic enough for a novel; such fire, such passionate invective, such wild despair! But, since I learnt how and why you married me, I will tell you what I have made up my mind to do. After the inquest I am going to turn you out of this house, and give you a pittance to live on so long as you remain here. I wish you to become a visible moral, a walking monument of disgrace in the neighbourhood you ruled. Should you attempt to escape me, the payment will be stopped; should you obtain employment, your character

shall be exposed. At every turn you shall be struck down till you learn to kiss the hand that strikes you and beg for pity on your knees. My revenge, Anne, shall be to break your spirit."

"And are you not perhaps afraid that I may turn upon you? You know me to be a woman of strong will and many resources, some of which you do not even understand."

"No, I am not afraid, because I still have a reserve force; I still hold the letters that I stole two days ago; and, even should you murder me, I have left directions that will ensure your exposure."

A pause ensued.

"Have you nothing more to say?"

"Nothing."

"Supposing, Anne, that I were to tell you that I have been trying to frighten you, and that if you were to go down on your knees before me now, and beg my forgiveness, I would forgive you—no, not forgive you, but let you off with easier terms—would you do it?"

"No, John, I would not. Once I went on my knees to a man, and I have not forgotten the lesson he taught me. Do your worst."

"Then you understand my terms, and accept them?"

"Understand them! yes. I understand that you are a little-minded man, and, like all little-minded men, cruel, and desirous of exacting the uttermost farthing in the way of revenge, forgetting that you owe everything to me. I do not wish to exculpate myself, mind you. Looking at the case from your point of view, and in your own petty way, I can almost sympathise with you. But as for accepting your terms—do you know me so little as to think that I could do so? Have you not learnt that I may

break, but shall never bend? And, if I chose now to face the matter out, I should beat you, even now when you hold all the cards in your hand; but I am weary of it all, especially weary of you and your little ways, and I do not choose. You will injure me enough to make the great success I planned for us both impossible, and I am tired of everything except the success which crowns a struggle. Well, I have ways of escape you know nothing of. Do your worst; I am not afraid of you;" and she leaned back easily in her chair, and looked at him with wearied and indifferent eyes.

Little Sir John ground his teeth, and twisted his pippen-like face into a scowl that looked absurdly out of place on anything so jovial.

"Curse you!" he said, "even now you dare to defy me. Do you know, you woman fiend, that at this moment I almost think I love you?"

"Of course I know it. If you did not love me, you would not take all this trouble to try to crush me. But this conversation is very long; shall we put an end to it?"

Sir John sat still a moment, thinking, and gazing at the splendid Sphinx-browed creature before him with a mixture of hatred and respect. Then he rose, and spoke.

"Anne, you are a wonderful woman! I cannot do it, I cannot utterly ruin you. You must be exposed—I could not help that, if I would—and we must separate, but I will be generous to you; I will allow you five hundred a year, and you shall live where you like. You shall not starve."

She laughed a little as she answered—

"I am starving now; it is long past luncheon time. As for your five hundred a year that you will give me out of the three or four thousand I have given you, I care

nothing for it. I tell you I am tired of it all, and I never felt more superior to you than I do now in the moment of your triumph. It wants a stronger hand than yours to humble me. I may be a bad woman, I daresay I am, but you will find, too late, that there are few in the world like me. For years you have shone with a reflected light; when the light goes out, you will go out too. Get back into your native mud, the mental slime out of which I picked you, contemptible creature that you are! and, when you have lost me, learn to measure the loss by the depths to which you will sink. I reject your offers. I mock at your threats, for they will recoil on your own head. I despise you, and I have done with you. John Bellamy, good-bye;" and, with a proud curtsy, she swept from the room.

That evening it was rumoured that Sir John Bellamy had separated from his wife, owing to circumstances which had come to his knowledge in connection with George Caresfoot's death.

CHAPTER XIII.

COVER IT UP AGAIN!

THAT same afternoon, Lady Bellamy ordered out the victoria with the fast trotting horse, and drove to the Abbey House. She found Philip pacing up and down the gravel in front of the grey old place, which had that morning added one more to the long list of human tragedies its walls had witnessed. His face was pale, and contorted by mental suffering, and, as soon as he recognised Lady Bellamy, he made an effort to escape. She stopped him.

"I suppose it is here, Mr. Caresfoot?"

"It! What?"

"The body."

"Yes."

"I wish to see it."

Philip hesitated a minute, and then led the way to his study. The corpse had been laid upon the table just as it had been taken from the water; indeed, the wet still fell in heavy drops from the clothes on to the ground. It was to be removed to Roxham that evening, to await the inquest on the morrow. The shutters of the room had been closed, lest the light should strike too fiercely on the ghastly sight; but even in the twilight Lady Bellamy could discern every detail of its outline clearly marked by the wet patches on the sheet which was thrown loosely over it. On a chair, by the side of the table, above the level of which its head rose, giving it the appearance of being in the act of climbing on to it, lay the carcass of the dog, its teeth still firmly set in the dead man's arm. They had been unable to unlock the savage grip without hacking its jaws asunder, and this it was not thought advisable to do till after the inquest.

At the door Philip paused, as though he did not mean to enter.

"Come in," said Lady Bellamy; "surely you are not afraid of a dead man."

"I fear the dead a great deal more than I do the living," he muttered, but came in and shut the door.

As soon as her eyes had grown accustomed to the light, Lady Bellamy went up to the body, and, drawing off the sheet, gazed long and steadily at the mutilated face, on the lips of which the bloody froth still stood.

"I told him last night," she said presently to Philip,

“that we should never meet again alive, but I did not think to see him so soon like this. Do you know that I once loved that thing, that shattered brain directed the only will to which I ever bowed? But the love went out for ever last night, the chain snapped, and now I can look upon this sight without a single sigh or a regret, with nothing but loathing and disgust. There lies the man who ruined me—did you know it? I do not care who knows it now—ruined me with his eyes open, not caring anything about me; there lies the hard task-master whom I served through so many years, the villain who drove me against my will into this last crime which has thus brought its reward. The dog gave him his just due; look, its teeth still hold him, as fast, perhaps, as the memories of his crimes will hold him where he has gone. Regret him! sorrow for him! no, oh no! I can curse him as he lies, villain, monster, devil that he was!”

She paused, and even in the dim light Philip could see her bosom heave and her great eyes flash with the fierceness of her excitement.

“You should not talk so of the dead,” he said.

“You are right,” she answered; “he has gone beyond the reach of my words, but the thought of all the misery I have suffered at his hands made me for a moment mad. Cover it up again, the vile frame which held a viler soul; to the earth with the one, to undreamed-of sorrow with the other, each to its appointed place. How does it run?—‘The wages of sin is death.’ Yes, that is right. He is dead; the blow fell first on him, that was right, and I am about to die; and you—what will happen to you, the Judas of the plot, eh? You do not think that you will enjoy your blood-money in peace, do you?”

"What do you mean?" asked Philip, nervously; her wild way frightened him.

"Mean! why, that you are the sorriest knave of all. This man was at least led on to crime by passion; Belamy entered into it to work out a secret revenge, poor fool! I acted because I could not help myself at first, and then for the sake of the game itself, for, when I take a thing in my hand, I *will* succeed. But you, Philip Caresfoot, you sold your own flesh and blood for money or money's worth, and you are the worst of all—worse than George, for even a brutal love is a nobler thing than avarice like yours. Well, as the sin is, so will the punishment be."

"It is a lie! I thought that he was dead."

"You thought that Arthur Heigham was dead!—then I read your thoughts very wrongly when we met upon the road on Christmas Day. You wished to think that he was dead, but you did not think it. Even now your conscience is making a coward of you, and, as you said just now, for you the silence of the dead is more terrible than the accusations of the living. I know a little about you, Philip. Do you not see shadows on your walls, and do not departed voices come to haunt you in your sleep? I know you do, and I will tell you this—the *Things* which you have suffered from at times shall henceforth be your continual companions. If you can pray, pray with all your strength that your daughter may not die; for, if she does, her shadow will always be there to haunt you with the rest. Why do you tremble so at the mere mention of a spirit? Stand still, and I will show you one. I can, if I like."

Philip could bear it no longer. With a curse he burst out of the room. Presently she followed him, and

found him standing in front of the house, wiping the cold perspiration from his forehead.

"You accursed woman," he said, "go, and never come near this house again!"

"I never shall come to this house again," she answered. "Ah, here is my carriage. Good-bye, Philip Caresfoot. You are a very wealthy man now—worth I do not know how many thousands a year. You have been singularly fortunate—you have accomplished your ends. Few people can do that. May the accomplishment bring happiness with it! If you wish it to do so, stifle your conscience, and do not let your superstitions affect you. But, by the way, you know French, do you not? Then here is a maxim that, in parting, I recommend to your attention—it has some truth in it: *Il y a une page effrayante dans le livre des destinées humaines: on y lit en têtes ces mots 'les désirs accomplis.'*" And she was gone.

"I owed him a debt for tempting George on in that business," thought Lady Bellamy to herself, as she rolled swiftly down the avenue of giant walnuts; "but I think that I have repaid it. The thorn I have planted will fester in his flesh till he dies of the sore. Superstition run wild in his weak mind will make the world a hell for him, and that is what I wish."

Presently she stopped the carriage, and walked to the top of a little knoll commanding what had been Isleworth Hall, but was now a black smoking blot on the landscape. The white front of the house was still standing, though riven from top to bottom, and through its empty window-places the westering sun poured great streams of fire which looked like flame shining through the eye-sockets of a gigantic skull.

"I did that well," she said; "and yet how blind I was! I should have known that he spoke the truth when he said the letters were not there. My wit failed me—it always does fail at need. I thought the fire would reach them somehow."

When she arrived at Rewtham House, she found that Sir John had left, taking luggage with him, and stating that he was going to put up at an inn at Roxham. On the hall-table, too, lay a summons to attend the inquest on the body of George Caresfoot, which was to take place on the morrow. She tore it across. Then she went up and dressed herself for dinner with such splendour that her maid thought it necessary to remind her that there was no company coming.

"No," she said, with a strange smile; "but I am going out to-night. Give me my sapphire necklace."

She sat through dinner, and afterwards went into the drawing-room, and, opening a despatch-box, read and burnt a great number of papers.

"There go the keys to my knowledge," she said aloud, as they flickered and fell into ashes. "No one shall reap the fruits of my labours; and yet it is a pity—I was on the right track, and, though I could never have succeeded, another might. I had the key, though I could not find the lock. I must go through with it now. I cannot live deprived both of success and of my power, and I could never begin and climb that stair again."

Then, from a secret drawer in the despatch-box, she extracted a little phial, tightly stoppered and sealing-waxed. She examined it closely, and looked at the liquid in it against the light.

"My medicine has taken no harm during this twenty

years," she thought. "It still looks what it is—strong enough to kill a giant, and subtle enough to leave little trace upon a child." Then she shut up the despatch-box and put it away, and, going to the open window, looked up at the stars, and then down at the shadows flung by the clouds as they swept across the moon.

"Shadows," she mused, "below, and gleams of light between the shadows—that is like our life. Light above—pure, clear, eternal—that is like the wider life. And between the two—the night, and above them both—the stars.

"In the immensity, where shall I find my place? Oh, that I might sleep eternally! Yes, that would be best of all—to sink into sleep never ending, unbroken, and unbreakable, to be absorbed into the cool vastness of the night, and lie in her great arms for ever. Oh, Night! whom I have ever loved, you bring your sleep to wearied millions—bring *me* sleep eternal. But no, the stars are above the night, and above the stars is—what? Yes; the hour I dread like every other mortal with my body, and yet dare to long for with my spirit, has come. I am about to cast off Time, and pass into Eternity, to spring from the heights of Space into the uncertain arms of the Infinite. Yet a few minutes, and my essence, my vital part, will start upon its endless course, and passing far above those stars, will find the fount of that knowledge of which it has already sipped, and drink and drink till it grows like a God, and can look upon the truth and not be blinded. Such are my hopes. And yet—if there be a hell! My life has been evil, my sins many. What if there be an avenging Power waiting, as some think, to grind me into powder, and then endow each crushed particle with individual sense of endless

misery? What if there be a hell! In a few minutes, or what will seem but a few minutes—for surely, to the disembodied spirit, time cannot exist; though it sleep a billion years, it will be as a breath—I shall have solved the problem. I shall know what all the panic-stricken millions madly ask, and ask in vain! Yes, I shall know if *there is a hell!* Well, if there be, then I shall rule there, for power is mine. Let me hesitate no longer, but go and solve the problem before I grow afraid. Afraid!—I am not afraid. ‘I have immortal longings in me.’ Who was it said that? Oh, Cleopatra! Was Cleopatra more beautiful than I am, I wonder? I am sure that she was not so great; for, had I been she, Anthony should have driven Cæsar out of Egypt. Oh! if I could have loved with a pure and perfect love as other women may, and intertwined my destiny with that of some *great* man—some being of a nature kindred to my own—I should have been good and happy, and he should have ruled this country. But Fate and Fortune, grown afraid of what I should do, linked my life to a soulless brute! and, alas! like him I have fallen—fallen irretrievably!”

She closed the window, and, coming into the room, rang the bell.

“Bring me some wine,” she said to the servant. “I do not feel well.”

“What wine, my lady?”

“Champagne.”

The wine was brought, and stood, uncorked, upon the table.

“That will do,” she said. “Tell my maid not to sit up for me, it will be late before I go to bed to-night.”

The man bowed and went, and she poured out some of the sparkling wine, and then, taking the little phial,

opened it with difficulty, and emptied its contents into the glass. The wine boiled up furiously, turned milk-white, and then cleared again; but the poison had destroyed its sparkle—it was dead as ditch-water.

“That is strange,” she said, “I never saw that effect before.” Next she took the phial and powdered it into a pinch of tiny dust with a whale’s tooth that lay upon the table. The dust she carried to the window and threw out, a little at a time. Lady Bellamy wished to die, as she had lived, a mystery. Then she came and stood over the deadly draught she had compounded, and thought sometimes aloud and sometimes to herself.

“I have heard it said that suicides are cowards; let those who say it stand, as I stand to-night, with death lying in the little circle of a glass before them, and they will know whether they are cowards, or if they are spirits of a braver sort than those who can bear to drudge to the bitter end of life. It is not yet too late. I can throw that stuff away. I can leave this place and begin life anew in some other country; my jewels will give me the means, and, for the matter of that, I can always win as much money as I want. But, no; then I must begin again, and for that I have not the patience or the time. Besides, I long to *know*, to solve the mystery. Come, let me make an end, I will chance it. Spirits like my own wear their life only while it does not gall them; if it begins to fret, they cast it from them like a half-worn dress, scorning to wrap it round them till it drops away in rags.”

She raised the glass.

“How lonely this place is, and how still, and yet it may well be that there are millions round me watching what I do. Why does he come into my mind now, that

good man, and the child I bore him? Shall I see them presently? Will they crush me with reproaches? And—have my nerves broken down?—Is it fancy, or does that girl's pale face, with warning in her eyes, float between me and the wall? Well, I will drink to her, for her mind could match my own. She was, at least, my equal, and I have driven her mad! Let me taste this stuff."

Lifting the glass to her lips, she drank a little, and set it down. The effect was almost magical. Her eyes blazed, a new beauty bloomed upon her cheek, her whole grand presence seemed to gain in majesty. The quick drug for a moment burnt away the curtain between the seen and the unseen, and yet left her living.

"Ah!" she cried, in the silence of the room, "how it runs along my veins; I hear a rushing of the stars, I see strange worlds, my soul leaps through infinite spaces, the light of immortality strikes upon my eyes and blinds me. Come, life unending, I have conquered death!"

Seizing the poison, she swallowed what remained of it, and dashed the glass down beside her. Then she fell heavily on her face, once she struggled to her knees, then fell again, and lay still.

CHAPTER XIV.

HARD HIT.

AFTER throwing George Caresfoot into the bramble-bush, Arthur walked steadily back to the inn, where he arrived, quite composed in manner, at about half-past seven. Old Sam, the ostler, was in the yard, washing a trap. He went up to him, and asked when the next train started for London.

"There is one as leaves Roxham at nine o'clock, sir,

and an uncommon fast one, I'm told. But you bean't a-going yet, be you, sir?"

"Yes, have the gig ready in time to catch the train."

"Very good, sir. Been to the fire, I suppose, sir?" he went on, dimly perceiving that Arthur's clothes were torn. "It wore a fine place, it wore, and it did blaze right beautiful."

"No; what fire?"

"Bless me, sir, didn't you see it last night?—why, Isleworth Hall, to be sure. It wore burnt right out, and all as was in it."

"Oh! How did it come to get burnt?"

"Can't say, sir, but I did hear say how as Lady Bellamy was a-dining there last night along with the squire; the squire he went out somewhere, my lady she goes home, and the footman he goes to put out the lamp and finds the drawing-room a roaring fiery furnace, like as parson tells us on. But I don't know how that can be, for I heard how as the squire was a-dying, so 'taint likely that he was a-going out. But, lord, sir, folk in these parts do lie that uncommon, 'taint as it used to be when I was a boy. As like as no, he's no more dying than you are. Anyhow, sir, it all burned like tinder, and the only thing, so I'm told, as was saved was a naked stone statty of a girl with a chain round her wrists, as Jim Blakes, our constable, being in liquor, brought out in his arms, thinking how as it was alive, and tried to rewive it with cold water."

At that moment Sam's story was interrupted by the arrival of a farmer's cart.

"How be you, Sam?"

"Well, I thank yer, for seventy-two, that is, not particlar ill."

"Have you a gentleman of the name of Heigham staying here?"

"I am he," said Arthur, "do you want me?"

"No, sir, only the station-master at Roxham asked me to drop this here as it was marked immediate," and he handed Arthur a box.

Arthur thanked him, and, taking it, went up to his room, leaving old Sam delighted to find a new listener to his story of the fire.

It was from the florist, and contained the bouquet he had meant to give Angela on her wedding-day. It had cost him a great deal of thought that bouquet, to say nothing of five guineas of the coin of the realm, and he felt a certain curiosity to look at it, though to do so gave him something of the same sensation that we experience in reading a letter written by some loved hand which we know grew cold before the lines it traced could reach us. He took the box to his room and opened it. The bouquet was a lovely thing, and did credit even to Covent Garden, and the masses of stephanotis and orange-bloom, relieved here and there by rising sprays of lilies-of-the-valley, filled the whole room with fragrance.

He drew it from the zinc well in which it was packed in moss and cotton-wool, and wondered what he should do with it. He could not leave such a thing about, nor would he take it away. Suddenly an idea struck him, and he repacked it in its case as carefully as he could in the original moss and cotton-wool, and then looked about for the sheet of tissue-paper that should complete the covering. He had destroyed it, and had to search for a substitute. In so doing his eye fell upon a long envelope on his dressing-table and he smiled. It contained his marriage licence, and he bethought him that

it was a very fair substitute for tissue-paper, and quite as worthless. He extracted it, and, placing it over the flowers, closed up the box. Then he carefully directed it to "Mrs. George Caresfoot, Abbey House," and, ringing the bell, desired the Boots to find a messenger to take it over.

When he had done all this, he sat down and wondered what could have come to him that he could take pleasure in doing a cruel action only worthy of a jealous woman.

Perhaps of all the bitter cups which are held to our lips in this sad world there is none more bitter than that which it was his lot to drink of now. To begin with, the blow fell in youth, when we love or hate, or act, with an ardour and an entire devotion that we give to nothing in after-life. It is then that the heart puts forth its most tender and yet its most lusty shoots, and if they are crushed the whole plant suffers, and sometimes bleeds to death. Arthur, to an extent quite unrealized by himself, until he lost her, had centred all his life in this woman, and it was no exaggeration to say, as he had said to her, that she had murdered his heart, and withered up all that was best in it. She had done more, she had inflicted the most cruel injury upon him that a woman can inflict upon a man. She had shaken his belief in her sex at large.

Sitting there in his desolation, he felt that now he had lost Angela he could never be the same man he would otherwise have been. Her cruel desertion had shattered the tinted glass through which youth looks at the world, and before his day he now saw it as it is, grim and hard, and full of coarse realities, and did not yet know that time would again soften down the sharpest of the rough outlines, and throw a garment of its own

over the nakedness of life. He was a generous-hearted man and not a vain one, and had he thought that Angela had ceased to care for him and loved this other man better than himself, whatever suffering it might have caused him, he could have found it in his heart to forgive her, and even to sympathise with her; but he could not think this. Something told him that it was not so. She had contracted herself into a shameful, loveless marriage, and, to gain ends quite foreign to all love, had raised a barrier between them which had no right to exist, and yet one that in this world could, he thought, never be removed.

Misfortunes rain upon us from every quarter of the sky, but so long as they come from the sky we can bear them, for they are beyond the control of our own volition, and must be accepted, as we accept the gale or the lightning. It is the troubles which spring from our own folly and weakness, or from that of those with whom our lives are intertwined, which really crush us. Now Arthur knew enough of the world to be aware that there is no folly to equal that of a woman, who, of her own free will, truly loving one man whom she can marry if she wishes it, deliberately gives herself to another. It is not only a folly, it is a crime, and, like most crimes, for this life, an irretrievable mistake.

Long before he got back to London, the first unwholesome exaltation of mind had evaporated that always follows a great misfortune, and which may perhaps be compared with the excitement that for awhile covers the shameful sense of defeat in an army, and he began to realise the crushing awfulness of the blow which had fallen on him, and to fear lest it should drive him mad. He looked round his little horizon for some straw of

comfort at which to catch, and could find none; nothing but dreadful thoughts and sickening visions.

And then suddenly, just as he was sinking into the dulness of despair, there came, like the first gleam of light in chaotic darkness, the memory of Mildred Carr. Truly she had spoken prophetically. His idol had been utterly cast down and crushed to powder by a hand stronger than his own. He would go to her in his suffering; perhaps she could find means to comfort him.

When he reached town he took a hansom and went to look for some rooms; he would not return to those he had left on the previous afternoon, for the sympathetic landlord had helped him to pack up the wedding clothes and had admired the wedding gift. Arthur felt that he could not face him again. He found some to suit him in Duke Street, St. James, and left his things there. Thence he drove to Fenchurch Street and took a passage to Madeira. The clerk, the same one who had given him his ticket about a year before, remembered him perfectly, and asked him how he got on with Mrs. Carr. But when his passage was taken he was disgusted to find that the mail did not sail for another five days. He looked at his watch, it was only half-past one o'clock. He could scarcely believe that what had happened had occurred that morning, only seven hours ago. It seemed to him that he had stood face to face with Angela, not that morning, but years ago, and miles away, on some desolate shore which lay on the other side of a dead ocean of pain. And yet it was only seven hours! If the hours went with such heavy wings, how would the days pass, and the months, and the years?

What should he do with himself? In his condition perpetual activity was as necessary to him as air, he must

do something to dull the sharp edge of his suffering, or the sword of madness which hung over him by such a slender thread would fall. Suddenly he bethought him of a man whom he had known slightly up at Cambridge, a man of wealth and evil reputation. This man would, he felt, be able to put him in a way of getting through his time. He knew his address and thither he drove.

Four days later, a figure, shrunk, shaky, and looking prematurely old, with the glaze of intoxication scarcely faded from his eye, walked into Mr. Borley's office. That respectable gentleman looked and looked again.

"Good Heavens!" he said at length; "it isn't Arthur Heigham."

"Yes, it is, though," said an unequal voice; "I've come for some money. I've got none left, and I am going to Madeira to-morrow."

"My dear boy, what has happened to you! You look so very strange. I have been expecting to see your marriage in the paper. Why, it's only a few days ago that you left to be married."

"A few days? A few years, you mean. I've been jilted, that's all, nothing to speak of, you know, but I had rather not talk about it, if you don't mind. I'm like a nag with a flayed back, don't like the sight of the saddle at present," and poor Arthur, mentally and physically exhausted, put his head down on his arm and gulped.

The old lawyer took in the situation at a glance.

"Hard hit," he said to himself; "and gone on the burst," and then aloud, "well, well, that has happened to many a man, in fact, you mightn't believe it, but it once happened to me, and I don't look much the worse,

do I? But we won't talk about it. The less said of a bad business the better, that's my maxim. And so you are going abroad again. Have you got any friends at Madeira?"

Arthur nodded.

"And you want some more money. Let me see, I sent you £200 last week."

"That was for my wedding tour. I've spent it now. You can guess how I have spent it. Pleasant contrast, isn't it? Gives rise to moral reflections."

"Come, come, Heigham, you must not give way like that. These things happen to most men in the course of their lives, and if they are wise it teaches them that gingerbread isn't all gilt, and to set down women at their proper value, and appreciate a good one if it pleases Providence to give them one in course of time. Don't you go making a fool of yourself over this girl's pretty face. Handsome is as handsome does. These things are hard to bear, I know, but you don't make them any better by pitching your own reputation after a girl's want of stability."

"I know that you are quite right, and I am much obliged to you for your kind advice, but we won't say anything more about it. I suppose that you can let me have some money?"

"Oh yes, if you want it, though I think we shall have to overdraw. What do you want? Two hundred? Here is the cheque."

"I am anxious about that young fellow," said Mr. Borley to himself, in the pause between Arthur's departure and the entry of the next client. "I hope his disappointment won't send him to the dogs. He is not of the sort who take it easy, like I did, for instance.

Dear me, that is a long while ago now. I wonder what the details of his little affair were, and who the girl married. Captain Shuffle! yes, show him in."

CHAPTER XV.

THE BUDDING OF THE HYACINTH.

NEXT morning Arthur cashed his cheque, and started on his travels. He had no very clear idea why he was going back to Madeira, or what he meant to do when he got there; but then, at this painful stage of his existence, none of his ideas could be called clear. Though he did not realise it, what he was searching for was sympathy, female sympathy of course; for in trouble members of either sex gravitate instinctively to the other for comfort. Perhaps they do not quite trust their own, or perhaps they are afraid of being laughed at.

Arthur's was not one of those natures that can lock its griefs within the bosom, and let them lie there till in process of time they shrivel away. Except among members of the peerage, as pictured in current literature, these stern, proud creatures are not common. Man, whether he figures in the world as a peer or a hedge-carpenter, as a matter of fact is mentally as well as physically, gregarious, and adverse to loneliness either in his joys or sorrows.

Decidedly, too, the homœopathic system must be founded on great natural facts, and there is philosophy, born of the observation of human nature, in the somewhat vulgar proverb that recommends a "hair of the dog that bit you." Otherwise, nine men out of every ten who have been badly treated, or think that they have been badly treated, by a woman, would not at once rush

headlong for refuge to another, a proceeding which also, in nine cases out of ten, ends in making confusion worse confounded.

Arthur, though he was not aware of it, was exemplifying a natural law that has not yet been properly explained. But, even if he had known it, it is doubtful if the knowledge would have made him any happier; for it is irritating to reflect that we are the slaves of natural laws, that our action is not the outcome of our own volition, but of a vague force working silently as the Gulf Stream—since such knowledge makes a man measure his weakness, and so strikes at his tenderest point, his vanity.

But, whilst we have been reflecting, Arthur was making his way to Madeira, so we may as well all come to a halt off Funchal.

Very shortly after the vessel had dropped her anchor, Arthur was greeted by his friend, the manager of "Miles' Hotel."

"Glad to see you, sir, though I can't say that you look well. I scarcely expected to find anybody for us at this time of year. Business is very slack in the summer."

"Yes, I suppose that Madeira is pretty empty."

"There is nobody here at all, sir."

"Is Mrs. Carr gone, then?" asked Arthur, in some alarm.

"No; she is still here. She has not been away this year. But she has been very quiet; no parties or anything, which makes people think that she has lost money."

By this time the boat was rising on the roll of the last billow, to be caught next moment by a dozen hands, and dragged up the shingle. It was evening, or rather, verging that way, and from under the magnolia-trees below the cathedral there came the sound of the band

summoning the inhabitants of Funchal to congregate, chatter, and flirt.

"I think," said Arthur, "that I will ask you to take my things up to the hotel. I will come by-and-by. I should like the same room I had before, if it is empty."

"Very good, Mr. Heigham. You will have the place nearly all to yourself now."

Having seen his baggage depart, Arthur turned, and resisting the importunities of beggars, guides, and parrot-sellers, who had not yet recognised him as an old hand, made his way towards the Quinta Carr. How well he knew the streets and houses, even to the withered faces of the women who sat by the doors, and yet he seemed to have grown old since he had seen them. Ten minutes of sharp walking brought him to the gates of the Quinta, and he paused before them, and thought how, a few months ago, he had quitted them, miserable at the grief of another, now to re-enter them utterly crushed by his own.

He walked on through the beautiful gardens to the house. The hall-door stood open. He did not wait to ring, but, driven by some impulse, entered. After the glare of the sun, which at that time of the year was powerful even in its decline, the carefully shaded hall seemed quite dark. But by degrees his eyes adapted themselves to the altered light, and began to distinguish the familiar outlines of the furniture. Next they travelled to the door of the drawing-room, where another sight awaited them. For there, herself a perfect picture, standing in the doorway for a frame, her hands outstretched in welcome, and a loving smile upon her lips, was Mildred.

"I was waiting for you," she said, gently. "I thought that you would come."

"Mildred, my idol has been cast down, and, as you told me to do, I have come back to you."

"Dear," she answered, "you are very welcome."

And then came Miss Terry, pleased with all her honest heart to see him, and utterly ignorant of the fierce currents that swept under the smooth surface of their little social sea. Miss Terry was not by nature a keen observer.

"Dear me, Mr. Heigham, who would have thought of seeing you again so soon? You *are* brave to cross the bay so often" (her thoughts ran a great deal on the Bay of Biscay); "but I don't think you look quite well; you have such black lines under your eyes, and, I declare, there's a grey hair!"

"Oh, I assure you your favourite bay was enough to turn anybody's hair white, Miss Terry."

And so, talking cheerfully, they went in to the pleasant little dinner, Mildred leaning ever so slightly on his arm, and gazing into his sad face with full and happy eyes. After all that he had gone through, it seemed to Arthur as though he had dropped into a haven of rest.

"See here," said Mildred, when they rose from table, "a wonder has come to pass since you deserted us. Look, sceptic, that you are!" and she led him to the window, and, lifting a glass shade which protected a flower-pot, showed him a green spike peeping from the soil.

"What is that?"

"What it is?—why, it is the mummy hyacinth which you declared that we should never see blossom in this world. It has budded; whether or not it will blossom, who can say?"

"It is an omen," he said, with a little laugh; and for the first time that evening their eyes met.

"Come into the garden, and you can smoke on the museum verandah; it is pleasant there these hot nights."

"It is dangerous, your garden."

She laughed softly. "You have proved yourself superior to danger."

Then they passed out together. The evening was still and very sultry. Not a breath stirred the silence of the night. The magnolia, the moon-flower, and a thousand other blooms poured out their fragrance upon the surrounding air, where it lay in rich patches, like perfume thrown on water. A thin mist veiled the sea, and the little wavelets struck with a sorrowful sound against the rock below.

"Tell me all about it, Arthur."

She had settled herself upon a long low chair, and as she leant back the starlight glanced white upon her arms and bosom.

"There is not much to tell. It is a common story—at least, I believe so. She threw me over, and the day before I should have married her, married another man."

"Well?"

"Well, I saw her the morning following her marriage. I do not remember what I said, but I believe I spoke what was in my mind. She fainted, and I left her."

"Ah, you spoke harshly, perhaps."

"Spoke harshly! Now that I have had time to think of it, I wish that I could have had ten imaginations to shape my thoughts, and ten tongues to speak them with! Do you understand what this woman has done? She has sold herself to a brute—oh, Mildred, such a brute! She has deserted me for a man who is not even a gentleman."

"Perhaps she was forced into it."

“Forced!—nonsense; we are not in the Middle Ages. A good woman should have been forced to drown herself before she consented to commit such a sacrilege against herself as to marry a man she hated. But she, ‘my love, my dove, my undefiled’—she whom I thought whiter than the snow—she could do this, and do it deliberately. I had rather have seen her dead, and myself dead with her.”

“Don’t you take a rather exaggerated view, Arthur? Don’t you think, perhaps, that some of the fault lies with you for overrating women? Believe me, so far as my experience goes, and I have seen a good many, the majority of them do not possess the exalted purity of mind you and many very young men attribute to them. They are, on the contrary, for the most part quite ready to exercise a wise discretion in the matter of marriage, even when the feeble tendencies which represent their affections point another way. A little pressure goes a long way with them; they are always glad to make the most of it; it is the dust they throw up to hide their retreat. Your Angela, for instance, was no doubt, and probably still is, very fond of you. You are a charming young man, with nice eyes and a taking way with women, and she would very much have liked to marry you; but then she also liked her cousin’s estates. She could not have both, and, being forced to choose, she chose the latter. You should take a common-sense view of the matter; you are not the first who has suffered. Women, especially young women, who do not understand the value of affection, must be very much in love before they submit to the self-sacrifice that is supposed to be characteristic of them, and what men talk of as stains upon them they do not consider as such. They know, if they

know nothing else, that a good income and an establishment will make them perfectly clean in the opinion of their own small world—a little world of shams and forms that cares nothing for the spirit of the moral law, provided the letter is acted up to. It is by this that they mark their standard of personal virtues, not by the high rule you men imagine for them. There is no social fuller's soap so effectual as money and position."

"You speak like a book, and give your own sex a high character. Tell me, then, would you do such a thing?"

"I, Arthur? How can you ask me? I had rather be torn to pieces by wild horses. I spoke of the majority of women, not of them all."

"Ah! and yet she could do it, and I thought her better than you."

"I do not think that you should speak bitterly of her, Arthur; I think that you should be sorry for her."

"Sorry for her? Why?"

"Because, from what I have gathered about her, she is not quite an ordinary young woman: however badly she may have treated you, she is a person of refined feelings and susceptibilities. Is it not so?"

"Without a doubt."

"Well, then, you should pity her, because she will bitterly expiate her mistake. For myself, I do not pity her much, because I will not waste my sympathy on a fool; for, to my mind, the woman who could do what she has done, and deliberately throw away everything that can make life really worth living to us women, is a most contemptible fool. But you love her, and, therefore, you should be sorry for her."

"But why?"

"Because she is a woman who at one and twenty has

buried all the higher part of her life, who has, of her own act, for ever deprived herself of joys that nothing else can bring her. Love, true love, is almost the only expression, of which we women are capable, of all the nobler instincts and vague yearnings after what is higher and better than the things we see and feel around us. When we love most, and love happily, then we are at our topmost bent, and soar further above the earth than anything else can carry us. Consequently, when a woman is faithless to her love, which is the purest and most honourable part of her, the very best thing to which she can attain, she clips her wings, and can fly no more, but must be tossed, like a crippled gull, hither and thither upon the stormy surface of her little sea. Of course, I speak of women of the higher stamp. Many, perhaps most, will feel nothing of all this. In a little while they will grow content with their dull round and the alien nature which they have mated with, and in their children, and their petty cares and dissipations, will forget that they possess a higher part, if indeed they do possess it. Like everything else in the world, they find their level. But with women like your Angela it is another thing. For them time only serves to increasingly unveil the Medusa-headed truth, till at last they see it as it is, and their hearts turn to stone. Racked with a sick longing to see a face that is gone from them, they become lost spirits, wandering everlastingly in the emptiness they have chosen, and finding no rest. Even her children will not console her."

Arthur uttered a smothered exclamation.

"Don't start, Arthur; you *must* accustom yourself to the fact that this woman has passed away from you, and is as completely the personal property of another man,

as that chair is mine. But, there, the subject is a painful one to you; shall we change it?"

"It is one that you seem to have studied pretty deeply."

"Yes, because I have realised its importance to a woman. For some years I have longed to be able to fall in love, and when at last I did so, Arthur," and here her voice grew very soft, "it was with a man who could care nothing for me. Such has been my unlucky chance. That a woman, herself loving and herself worthily beloved, could throw her blessed opportunity away is to me a thing inconceivable, and that, Arthur, is what your Angela has done."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STORM BURSTS.

"THEN you will not marry now, Mildred?" said Arthur, after a pause.

"No, Arthur."

"No one?"

"No one, Arthur."

He rose, and, leaning over the railing of the verandah, looked at the sea. The mist that hid it was drifting and eddying hither and thither before little puffs of wind, and the clear sky was clouding up.

"There is going to be a storm," he said, presently.

"Yes, I think so, the air feels like it."

He hesitated a while, and looked down at her. She seemed very lovely in the half lights, as indeed she was. She, too, looked up at him inquiringly. At last he spoke.

"Mildred, you said just now that you would not

marry anybody. Will you make an exception?—will you marry me?”

It was her turn to pause now.

“You are very good,” she murmured.

“No, I am not at all good. You know how the case stands. You know that I still love Angela, and that I shall in all probability always love her. I cannot help that. But if you will have me, Mildred, I will try to be a good husband to you, and to make you happy. Will you marry me, dear?”

“No, Arthur.”

“Why not? Have you, then, ceased to care for me?”

“No, dear. I love you more than ever. You cannot dream how much I do love you.”

“Then why will you not marry me? Is it because of this business?”

“No,” and raising herself in the low chair, she looked at him with intense earnestness, “that is not the reason. I will not marry you, because I have become a better woman since you went away, because I do not wish to ruin your life. You ask me to do so now in all sincerity, but you do not know what you ask. You come from the scene of as bitter a disappointment as can befall a man, and you are a little touched by the contrasting warmth of your reception here, a little moved by my evident interest, and perhaps a little influenced by my good looks, though *they* are nothing much. Supposing that I consented, supposing I said, ‘Arthur, I will put my hand in yours and be your wife,’ and that we were married to-morrow, do you think, when the freshness of the thing had worn off, that you would be happy with me? I do not. You would soon get horribly tired of me, Arthur, for the little leaven that leavens the whole lump

is wanting. You do not love me; and the redundancy of my affection would weary you, and, for my part, I should find it difficult to continually struggle against an impalpable rival, though, indeed, I should be very willing to put up with that."

"I am sorry you think so."

"Yes, Arthur, I do think so; but you do not know what it costs me to say it. I am deliberately shutting the door which bars me from my heaven; I am throwing away the chance I strove so hard to win. That will tell you how much I think it. Do you know, I must be a strange contradiction. When I knew that you were engaged to another woman, I strained my every nerve to win you from her. While the object was still to be gained, I felt no compunction; I was fettered by no scruples. I wanted to steal you from her and marry you myself. But now that all this is changed, and that you of your own free will come and offer to make me your wife, I for the first time feel how wrong it would be of me to take advantage of you in a moment of pique and disappointment, and bind you for life to a nature which you do not really understand, to a violent and a jealous woman. Too late, when your life was hampered and your future spoiled, you would discover that you hated me. Arthur, dear, I will not consent to bind you to me by any tie that cannot be broken."

"Hush, Mildred! you should not say such things about yourself. If you are as violent and jealous as you say, you are also a very noble-hearted woman, for none other would so sacrifice herself. Perhaps you are right; I do not know. But, whether you are right or wrong, I cannot tell you how you have made me respect you."

"Dear, those are the most comfortable words I have

ever heard; after what has passed between us, I scarcely thought to win your respect."

"Then you will not marry me, Mildred?"

"No, dear."

"That is your fixed determination."

"It is."

"Ah, well!" he sighed, "I suppose that I had better 'top my boom' again."

"Do what?"

"I mean I had better leave Madeira."

"Why should you leave Madeira?"

He hesitated a little before replying.

"Well, because if I do not marry you, and still come here, people will talk. They did before, you know."

"Are you afraid of being talked about, then?"

"I! Oh! dear no. What can it matter to me now?"

"And supposing I were to tell you that what 'people' say, with or without foundation, is as much a matter of indifference to me as the blowing of next summer's breezes, would you still consider it necessary to leave Madeira?"

"I don't know."

He again rose and leant over the verandah rail.

"It is going to be a wild night," he said, presently.

"Yes; the wind will spoil all the magnolias. Pick me that bud; it is too good to be wasted."

He obeyed, and, just as he stepped back on to the verandah, a fierce rush of wind came up from the sea, and went howling behind them.

"I love a storm," she murmured, as he brought the flower to her. "It makes me feel so strong," and she stretched out her perfect arms as though to catch the wind.

"What am I to do with this magnolia?"

"Give it to me. I will pin it to my dress—no, do you fasten it for me."

The chair in which she was lounging was so low that, to do as she bade him, Arthur was forced to kneel beside her. Kneeling thus, the sweet, upturned face was but just beneath his own; the breath from the curved lips played amongst his hair, and again there crept over him that feeling of fascination, of utter helplessness, which he had once before resisted. But this time he did not attempt to resist, and no vision came to save him. Drawn by the beauty of her tender eyes, he yielded slowly to the spell, and soon her lips were pressed upon his own, and the white arms had closed around his neck, while the crushed magnolia bloom shed its perfume around them.

Fiercer swept the storm, the lightning flashed, and the gale, catching the crests of the rising waves, dashed them in spray to where they sat.

"Dear," he said presently, "you must not stop here; the spray is wetting you."

"I wish that it would drown me," she answered, almost fiercely; "I shall never be so happy again. You think that you love me now; I should like to die before you learn to hate me. Come, let us go in."

CHAPTER XVII.

ON BOARD THE "EVENING STAR."

WHEN Mildred received Lady Bellamy's telegram, she was so sure that it would prove the forerunner of Arthur's arrival at Madeira that she had at once set about making arrangements for his amusement.

It so happened that there was at that time a very

beautiful sea-going steam yacht of about two hundred and fifty tons burden lying in the roadstead. She belonged to a nobleman who was suddenly recalled to England by mail-steamer, and, through a series of chances, Mildred was enabled to buy her a bargain. The crew of the departed nobleman also continued in her service.

The morning after the storm broke sweet and clear, and, except that the flowers were somewhat shattered, all Nature looked the fresher for its violent visitation. Arthur, who had come up early to the Quinta, Mildred, and Miss Terry were all seated at breakfast in a room that looked out to the sea, which although the wind had died away, still ran rather high. They made a pretty picture as they sat round the English-looking breakfast-table with the light streaming in upon them from the open windows, Miss Terry, with her usual expression of good-humoured solemnity, pouring out the tea, and Mildred and Arthur, who sat exactly opposite to each other, drinking it. Never had the former looked more lovely than she did that morning.

"My dear," said Agatha to her, "what have you done to yourself? You look beautiful."

"Do I, dear? Then it is because I am happy."

Agatha was quite right, thought Arthur, she did look beautiful, there was such depth and rest in her clear eyes, such happy triumph written on her features. She might have sat that morning as a study of the "Venus Victrix." Her talk, too, was as bright as herself. She laughed and shone and sparkled like the rain-drops on the bamboo sprays that rocked in the sunshine, and whenever she addressed herself to Arthur, which was often enough, every sentence seemed wrapped in tender meaning. Her whole life went out towards him, a palpable thing; she

waited on his words and basked in his smile. Mildred Carr did nothing by halves.

Arthur was the least cheerful of the three, though at times he tried his best to join in Mildred's merriment. Any one who knew him well could have told her that he was suffering from one of his fits of constitutional melancholy, and a physiognomist, looking at the somewhat dreamy eyes and pensive face, would probably have added that he neither was nor ever would be an entirely happy man.

By degrees, however, he seemed to get the better of his thoughts, whatever they might be.

"Now, Arthur, if you are quite awake," began, or rather went on, Mildred, "perhaps you will come to the window. I have something to show you."

"Here I am at your service; what may it be?"

"Good. Now look; do you see that little vessel in the bay beneath there to the right of Leeuw Rock?"

"Yes, and uncommonly pretty she is; what of her?"

"What of her? Why, she is my yacht."

"Your yacht."

"Goodness gracious, Mildred, you don't mean to say that you have been buying a yacht and told me nothing about it? Just think! Well, I call that sly."

"Yes, my dear Agatha, I have; a yacht and a ready-made crew, and the very prettiest saloon in the world, and sleeping-cabins that you will think it an honour to be sea-sick in, and a cook's galley with bright copper fittings, and a cook with a white cap, and steam-steering gear if you care to use it, and——"

"For goodness sake, don't overwhelm us; and what are you going to do with your white elephant, now that you have got it?"

"Do with it? why, ride on it, of course. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' or rather 'lady and gentleman.' Attention! You will both be in marching, or rather in sailing order by four this afternoon, for at five we start for the Canaries. Now, no remarks; I'm a skipper, and I expect to be obeyed, or I'll put you in irons."

"You've done that already," said Arthur, *sotto voce*.

"Mildred, I won't go, and that's flat."

"My dear, you mean that you are afraid of being flat. But, Agatha, seriously, you must come; nobody is in those semi-tropical waters, and, if you won't I suppose it would not be quite the thing for Arthur and me to go alone. And then, my dear, just think what a splendid place the Canaries must be for insects."

"Why?" asked Agatha, solemnly.

"Because of all the little birds it has to support."

"But I thought they lived on hemp-seed."

"Oh, no—not in their native land."

"Well, I suppose I must go; but I really believe that you will kill me with your mania for sea-voyages, Mildred. I suppose you will take to ballooning next."

"That is by no means a bad idea; I should like to see you in a balloon, Agatha."

"Mildred, I know where to draw the line. Into a balloon I will never go. I have been in a Madeira sledge, and that is quite enough for me. I always dream about it twice a week."

"Well, my dear, I promise never to ask you when I want to go ballooning; Arthur and I will go by ourselves. It would be a grand opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*. And now go and see about getting the things ready—there's a dear; and, Arthur, do you send John down to Miles' for your portmanteau."

"Hadn't I better go and see about it myself?"

"Certainly not. I want you to help me, and come down and talk to the skipper, for he will be under your orders, you know. He is such a delightful sailor man, perfect down to his quid, and always says, 'Ay, ay,' in the orthodox fashion. Certainly you must not go; I will not trust you out of my sight—you might run away and leave me alone, and then what should I do?"

Arthur laughed and acquiesced. Sitting down, he wrote a note asking the manager of the hotel to send his things up to the Quinta Carr, together with his account, as he was leaving Madeira for the present.

The rest of the morning was spent by everybody in busy preparation. Boxes were packed and provisions shipped sufficient to victual an Arctic expedition. At last everything was ready, and at a little after three they went down the steps leading to the tiny bay, and, embarking on the smart boat that was waiting for them, were conveyed in safety to the *Evening Star*, for such was the yacht's name. Arthur suggested that it should be changed to the *Mildred Carr*, and got snubbed for his pains.

The *Evening Star* was a beautiful craft, built on fine lines, but for all that a wonderful boat in a heavy sea. She was a three-masted schooner, square-rigged forward, of large beam. Her fittings below were perfect down to the painted panels after Watteau in the saloon and the electric bells, and she was rigged either to sail or steam as might be most convenient. On the present occasion, as there was not the slightest hurry and no danger of a lee-shore, it was determined that they should not avail themselves of the steam-power, so the propeller was hoisted

up and everything made ready for that most delightful thing, a long cruise under canvas.

Arthur was perfectly charmed with all he saw, and so was Agatha Terry, until they got under way, when she discovered that a mail-steamer was a joke compared with the yacht in the matter of motion. In short, the unfortunate Agatha was soon reduced to her normal condition of torpor. Mildred always declared that she hibernated on board ship like a dormouse or a bear. She was not very sea-sick; she simply lay and slept, eating very little and thinking not at all.

"By the way," said Arthur, as they sailed out of the bay, "I never gave any directions about my letters."

"Oh! that will not matter," answered Mildred, carelessly, for they were leaning over the taffrail together; "they will keep them for you at 'Miles' Hotel.' But, my dear boy, do you know what time it is? Ten minutes to seven; that dreadful bell will be going in a minute, and the soup will be spoiled. Run and get ready, do!"

When dinner was over—Miss Terry would have none—they went and sat upon the moonlit deck. The little vessel was under all her canvas, for the breeze was light, and skimmed over the water like a gull with its wings spread. In the low light Madeira was nothing but a blot on the sky-line. The crew were forward, with the solitary exception of the man steering the vessel from his elevated position on the bridge; and sitting as they were, abaft the deck-cabin, the two were utterly alone between the great silences of the stars and of the sea. She looked into his face, and it was tender towards her—that night was made for lovers—and tears of happiness stood in her eyes. She took his hand in hers, and her head nestled upon his breast.

"I should like to sail on for ever so, quite alone with you. I never again wish to see the land or the sun, or any other sea than this, or any other eyes than yours, to hear any more of the things that I have known, to learn to know any fresh things. If I could choose, I would ask that I might now glide gently from your arms into those of eternal sleep. Oh! Arthur, I am so happy now—so happy that I scarcely dare to speak, for fear lest I should break the spell—and I feel so good—so much nearer heaven. When I think of all my past life, it seems like a stupid dream full of little nothings, of which I cannot recall any memory except that they were empty and without meaning. But the future is worse than the past, because it looks fair, and snakes always hide in flowers. It makes me afraid. How do I know what the future will bring? I wish that the present—the pleasant, certain present that I hold with my hand—could last for ever."

"Who does know, Mildred? If the human race could see the pleasant surprises in store for it individually, I believe that it would drown itself *en masse*. Who has not sometimes caught at the skirt of to-day and cried, 'Stay a little—do not let to-morrow come yet!' You know the lines—

'O temps, suspends ton vol, et vous, heures propices,
Suspendez votre cours,
Laissez-nous savourer les rapides délices
Des plus beaux de nos jours.'

Lamartine only crystallised a universal aspiration when he wrote that."

"Oh! Arthur, I tell you of love and happiness wide as the great sea round us, and you talk of 'universal aspirations.' It is the first cold breath from that grey-skied future which I fear. Oh! dear, I wonder—you do

not know how I wonder—if, should you ask me again, I shall ever with a clear conscience be able to say, 'Arthur, I will marry you.'"

"My dear, I asked you to be my wife last night, and what I said then I say again now. In any case, until you dismiss me, I consider myself bound to you; but I tell you frankly that I should myself prefer that you would marry me for both our sakes."

"How cold and correct you are, how clearly you realise the position in which I am likely to be put, and in what a gentleman-like way you assure me that your honour will always keep you bound to me! That is a weak thread, Arthur, in matters of the heart. Let Angela reappear as my rival—would honour keep you to my side? Honour, forsooth! it is like a nurse's bogey in the cupboard—it is a shibboleth men use to frighten naughty women with, which for themselves is almost devoid of meaning. Even in this light I can see your face flush at her name. What chance shall I ever have against her?"

"Do not speak of her, Mildred; let her memory be dead between us. She who belonged to me before God, and whom I believed in as I believe in my God, she offered me the most deadly insult that a woman can offer to a man she loves—she sold herself. What do I care what the price was, whether it were money, or position, or convenience, or the approbation of her surroundings? The result is the same. Never mention her name to me again; I tell you that I hate her."

"What a tirade! There is warmth enough about you now. I shall be careful how I touch on the subject again; but your very energy shows that you are deceiving yourself. I wish I could hear you speak of me like that, because then I should know you loved me. Oh! if she

only knew it—she has her revenge for all your bitter words. You are lashed to her chariot-wheels, Arthur. You do *not* hate her; on the contrary, you still long to see her face; it is still your secret and most cherished hope that you will meet her again either in this or another world. You love her as much as ever. If she were dead, you could bear it; but the sharpest sting of your suffering lies in the humiliating sense that you are forced to worship one you know to be false, and to give your own pure love to a woman whom you see debased.”

He put his hands to his face and groaned aloud.

“You are right,” he said. “I would rather have known her dead than know her as she is. But there is no reason why I should bore you with all this.”

“Arthur, you are nothing if not considerate, and I do not pretend that this is a very pleasant conversation for me; but I began it, so I suppose I must endure to see you groaning for another woman. You say,” she went on, with a sudden flash of passion, “that you should like to see her dead. I say that I should like to kill her, for she has struck me a double blow—she has injured you whom I love, and she has beggared me of your affection. Oh! Arthur,” she continued, changing her voice and throwing a caressing arm about his neck, “have you no heart left to give *me*? is there no lingering spark that *I* can cherish and blow to flame? I will never treat you so, dear. Learn to love me, and I will marry you and make you happy, make you forget this faithless woman with the angel face. I will——” here her voice broke down in sobs, and in the starlight the great tears glistened upon her coral-tinted face like dew-drops on a pomegranate flower.

"There, there, dear, I will try to forget; don't cry," and he touched her on the forehead with his lips.

She stopped, and then said, with just the faintest tinge of bitterness in her voice: "If it had been Angela who cried, you would not be so cold; you would have kissed away her tears."

Who can say what hidden chord of feeling those words touched, or what memories they awoke? but their effect upon Arthur was striking. He sprang up upon the deck, his eyes blazing, and his face white with anger.

"How often," he said, "must I forbid you to mention the name of that woman to me? Do you take a pleasure in torturing me? May she eat out her heart in solitude, and find no living thing to comfort her! May she suffer as she makes me suffer——"

"Be quiet, Arthur, it is shameful to say such things." Then he grew ashamed and was silent.

CHAPTER XVIII.

KILL ME!

DR. WILLIAMSON was a rising young practitioner at Roxham, and, what is more, a gentleman and a doctor of real ability.

On the night that Lady Bellamy took the poison he sat very late, till the dawn, in fact, working up his books of reference with a view to making himself as much the master as possible of the symptoms and most approved treatment in such cases of insanity as appeared to resemble Angela Caresfoot's. He had been called in to see her by Mr. Fraser, and had come away intensely interested from a medical point of view, and very much puzzled.

At length he shut them up with a sigh—for, like

most books, though full of generalities, they did not tell him much—and went to bed. Before he had been asleep very long, however, the surgery bell was violently rung, and, having dressed himself with the rapidity characteristic of doctors and schoolboys, he descended to find a frightened footman waiting outside, from whom he gathered that something dreadful had happened to Lady Bellamy, who had been found lying apparently dead upon the floor of her drawing-room. Providing himself with some powerful restoratives he drove rapidly to Rewtham House.

Here he found the patient laid upon a sofa in the room where she had been found, and surrounded by a mob of terrified and half-dressed servants. At first he thought life was quite extinct, but presently he fancied that he could detect a faint tremor of the heart. He applied the most powerful of his restoratives, and, after a considerable time, was rewarded by seeing the patient open her eyes—but only to shut them again immediately. Directing his assistant to continue the treatment, he tried to elicit some information from the servants as to what had happened, but all he could gather was that the maid had received a message not to sit up. This made him suspicious of an attempt at suicide, and just then his eye fell upon a wineglass that lay upon the floor, broken at the shank. He took it up; in the bowl there was still a drop or two of liquid. He smelt it, then dipped his finger in and tasted it, with the result that his tongue was burnt and became rough and numb. Then his suspicions were confirmed.

Presently Lady Bellamy opened her eyes again, and this time there was intelligence in them. She gazed round her with a wondering air. Next she spoke.

"Where am I?"

"In your own drawing-room, Lady Bellamy. Be quiet now, you will be better presently."

She tried first to move her head, then her arm, then her lower limbs, but they would not stir. By this time her faculties were wide awake.

"Are you the doctor?" she said.

"Yes, Lady Bellamy."

"Then tell me why I cannot move my arms."

He lifted her hand; it fell again like a lump of lead—and Dr. Williamson looked very grave. Then he touched her.

"Do you feel that?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Why cannot I move? Do not trifle with me, tell me quick."

Dr. Williamson was a young man, and had not quite conquered nervousness. In his confusion he muttered something about "paralysis."

"How is it that I am not dead?"

"I have brought you back to life, but pray do not talk."

"You fool! why could you not let me die? You mean that you have brought my mind to life, and left my body dead. I feel now that I am quite paralysed."

He could not answer her, what she said was only too true, and his look told her so. She gazed steadily at him for a moment as he bent over her, and realised all the horrors of her position, and for the first time in her life her proud spirit absolutely gave way. For a few seconds she was silent, and then, without any change coming over the expression of her features—for the wild gaze with which she had faced eternity was frozen there

—she broke out into a succession of the most heart-rending shrieks that it had ever been his lot to listen to. At last she stopped exhausted.

“Kill me!” she whispered, hoarsely, “kill me.”

It was a dreadful scene.

As the doctors afterwards concluded, rightly or wrongly, a very curious thing had happened to Lady Bellamy. Either the poison she had taken—and they were never able to discover what its exact nature was, nor would she enlighten them—had grown less deadly during all the years that she had kept it, or she had partially defeated her object by taking an overdose, or, as seemed more probable, there was some acid in the wine in which it had been mixed that had the strange effect of rendering it to a certain degree innocuous. Its result, however, as she guessed, was to render her a hopeless paralytic for life.

At length the patient sank into the coma of exhaustion, and Dr. Williamson was able to leave her in the care of a brother practitioner whom he had called in, and in that of his assistant. Sir John had been sent for, but had not arrived. It was then eleven o'clock, and at once the doctor was summoned as a witness to attend the inquest on George Caresfoot. He had, therefore, two hours at his disposal, and these he determined to utilise by driving round to see Angela, who was still lying at Mr. Fraser's vicarage.

Mr. Fraser heard him coming, and met him in the little drive. He briefly told him what he had just seen, and what, in his opinion, Lady Bellamy's fate must be—one of living death. The clergyman's remark was characteristic.

"And yet," he said, "there are people in the world who say that there is no God!"

"How is Mrs. Caresfoot?" asked the doctor.

"She had a dreadful fit of raving this morning, and we had to tie her down in bed. She is quieter now, poor dear. There, listen!"

At that moment, through the open window of the bedroom, they heard a sweet though untrained voice beginning to sing. It was Angela's, and she was singing snatches of an old-fashioned sailor-song, one of several which Arthur had taught her:

"Fare ye well, and adieu to all you Spanish ladies,
Fare ye well, and adieu to ye, ladies of Spain,
For we've received orders to return to Old England,
But we hope in a short time to see you again.

* * * * *

"We hove our ship to with the wind at sou'-west, my boys;
We hove our ship to for to strike soundings clear;
It was forty-five fathom and a grey sandy bottom;
Then we filled our main topsail, and up channel did steer.

* * * * *

"The signal was made for the grand fleet to anchor,
All in the Downs that night for to meet;
So cast off your shank-painter, let go your cat's-topper,
Hawl up your clew-garnets, let fly tack and sheet."

Without waiting to hear any more, they went up the stairs and entered the bedroom. The first person they saw was Pigott, who had been sent for to nurse Angela, standing by the side of the bed, and a trained nurse at a little table at the foot mixing some medicine. On the bed itself lay Angela, shorn of all her beautiful hair, her face flushed as with fever, except where a blue weal bore witness to the blow from her husband's cruel whip, her head thrown back, and a strange light in her wild eyes.

She was tied down to her bed, with a broad horse-girth stretched across her breast, but she had wrenched one arm free, and with it was beating time to her song on the bedclothes. She caught sight of Mr. Fraser at once, and seemed to recognise him, for she stopped her singing and laughed.

"That's a pretty old song, isn't it?" she said. "Somebody taught it me—who was it? Somebody—a long while ago. But I know another—I know another. You'll like it; you are a clergyman, you know." And she began again:

"Says the parson one day as I cursed a Jew,
Now do you not know that that is a sin?
Of you sailors I fear there are but a few
That St. Peter to heaven will ever let in.

"Says I, Mr. Parson, to tell you my mind,
Few sailors to knock were ever yet seen;
Those who travel by land may steer against wind,
But we shape a course for Fiddler's Green."

Suddenly she stopped, and her mind wandered off to the scene of two days previous with Arthur by the lake, and she began to quote the words wrung from the bitterness of his heart.

"'You miserable woman, do you know what you are? Shame upon you! Were you not married yesterday?' It is quite true, Arthur—oh yes, quite true! Say what you like of me, Arthur—I deserve it all; but oh! Arthur, I love you so. Don't be hard upon me—I love you so, dear! Kill me if you like, dear, but don't talk to me so. I shall go mad—I shall go mad!" and she broke into a flood of weeping.

"Poor dear! she has been going on like that, off and on, all night. It clean breaks my heart to see it, and

that's the holy truth," and Pigott looked very much as though she were going to cry herself.

By this time Angela had ceased weeping, and was brooding sullenly, with her face buried in the pillow.

"There is absolutely nothing to be done," said the doctor. "We can only trust to her fine constitution and youth to pull her through. She has received a series of dreadful mental shocks, and it is very doubtful if she will ever get over them. It is a pity to think that such a splendid creature may become permanently insane, is it not? You must be very careful, Pigott, that she does not do herself an injury; she is just in the state that she may throw herself out of the window or cut her throat. And now I must be going; I will call in again to-night."

Mr. Fraser accompanied him down to the gate, where he had left his trap. Before they got out of the front door, Angela had roused herself again, and they could hear her beginning to quote Homer, and then breaking out into snatches of her sailor-songs.

" 'High aloft amongst the rigging
Sings the loud exulting gale.'

That's like me. I sing too," and then followed peal upon peal of mad laughter.

"A very sad case! She has a poor chance, I fear."

Mr. Fraser was too much affected to answer him.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE INQUEST.

PUBLIC feeling in Marlshire was much excited about the Caresfoot tragedy, and, when it became known that Lady Bellamy had attempted to commit suicide, the excitement was trebled. It is not often that the dullest and most highly respectable part of an eminently dull and respectable county gets such a chance of cheerful and interesting conversation as these two events gave rise to. We may be sure that the godsend was duly appreciated; indeed, up to this hour, the whole story is a favourite subject of conversation in those parts.

Of course the members of the polite society of the neighbourhood of Roxham were divided into two camps. The men all thought that Angela had been shamefully treated, the elder and most intensely respectable ladies for the most part inclined to the other side of the question. It not being their habit to look at matters from the same point of view in which they present themselves to a man's nicer sense of honour, they could see no great harm in George Caresfoot's stratagems. A man so rich, they argued, was perfectly entitled to buy his wife. The marriage had been arranged, like their own, on the soundest property basis, and the woman who rose in rebellion against a husband merely because she loved another man, or some such romantic nonsense, deserved all she got. Gone mad, had she?—well, it was a warning! And these aristocratic matrons sniffed and turned up their noses. They felt that Angela, by going mad and creating a public excitement, had entered a mute protest against the recognised rules of marriage sale-and-

barter as practised in this country—and Zululand. Having daughters to dispose of, they resented this, and poor Angela was for years afterwards spoken of among them as that “immoral girl.”

But the lower and more humane strata of society did not sympathise with this feeling. On the contrary, they were all for Angela and the dog Aleck who was supposed to have choked that “carroty warmint,” George.

The inquest on George’s body was held at Roxham, and was the object of the greatest possible interest. Indeed, the public excitement was so great that the coroner perhaps insensibly was influenced by it, and allowed the inquiry to travel a little beyond its professed object of ascertaining the actual cause of death, with the result that many of the details of the wicked plot from which Angela had been the principal sufferer became public property. Needless to say, they did not soothe the feelings of an excited crowd. When Philip, after spending one of the worst half-hours of his life in the witness-box, at length escaped with such shreds of reputation as he had hitherto possessed altogether torn off his back, his greeting from the mob outside the court may fairly be described as a warm one. As the witnesses’ door closed behind him, he found himself at one end of a long lane, that was hedged on both sides by faces not without a touch of ferocity about them, and with difficulty kept clear by the available force of the five Roxham policemen.

“Who sold his daughter?” shouted a great fellow in his ear.

“Let me come, there’s a dear man, and have a look at Judas,” said a skinny little woman with a squint, to an individual who blocked her view.

The crowd caught at the word. "Judas!" it shouted, "go and hang yourself! Judas! Judas!"

How Philip got out of that he never quite knew, but he did get out somehow.

Meanwhile Sir John Bellamy was being examined in court, and, notwithstanding the almost aggressive innocence of his appearance, he was not having a very good time. It chanced that he had fallen into the hands of a rival lawyer, who hated him like poison, and had good reason to hate him. It is wonderful, by the way, how enemies do spring up round a man in trouble like dogs who bite a wounded companion to death, and on the same principle. He is defenceless. This gentleman would insist on conducting the witnesses' examination on the basis that he knew all about the fraud practised with reference to the supposed death of Arthur Heigham. Now, it will be remembered that Sir John, in his last interview with Lady Bellamy, had declared that there was no tittle of evidence against him, and that it would be impossible to implicate him in the exposure that must overtake her. To a certain extent he was right, but on one point he had overshoot himself, for at that very inquest Mr. Fraser stated on oath that he (Mr. Fraser) had spoken of Arthur Heigham's death in the presence of Sir John Bellamy, and had not been contradicted.

In vain did Sir John protest that Mr. Fraser must be mistaken. Both the jury and the public looked at the probabilities of the matter, and, though his protestations were accepted in silence, when he left the witness-box there was not a man in court, but was morally certain that he had been privy to the plot, and, so far as reputation was concerned, he was a ruined man. And yet legally there was not a jot of evidence against him. But public

opinion required that a scapegoat should be found, and it was now his lot to figure as that unlucky animal.

By the time he reached the exit into the street, the impression that he had had a hand in the business had, in some mysterious way, communicated itself to the mob outside, many a member of which had some old grudge to settle with "Lawyer Bellamy," if only chance put an opportunity in their way. As he stepped through the door utterly ignorant of the greeting which awaited him, his ears were assailed by an awful yell, followed by a storm of hoots and hisses.

Sir John turned pale, and looked for a means of escape; but the policeman who had let him out had locked the door behind him, and all round him was the angry mob.

"Here comes the —— that started the swim," roared a voice, as soon as there was a momentary lull.

"Gentlemen——" piped Sir John, all the pippin hue gone from his cheeks, and rubbing his white hands together nervously.

"Yah! he poisoned his own poor wife!" shouted a woman with a baby.

"Ladies——" went on Sir John in agonised tones.

"Pelt him!" yelled a sweet little boy of ten or so, suiting the action to the word, and planting a rotten egg full upon Sir John's imposing brow.

"No, no," said the woman who had nicknamed Philip "Judas." "Why don't you drop him in the pond? There is only two feet of water, and it is soft falling on the mud. You can pelt him afterwards."

The idea was received with acclamation, and notwithstanding his own efforts to the contrary, backed as they were by those of the five policemen, before he knew

where he was Sir John found himself being hustled by a lot of sturdy fellows towards the filthy duckpond, like an aristocrat to the guillotine. They soon arrived, and then followed the most painful experience of all his life, one of which the very thought would ever afterwards move him most profoundly. Two strong men, utterly heedless of his yells and lamentations, took him by the heels, and two yet stronger than they caught him by his plump and tender wrists, and then, under the directions of the woman with the squint, they began to swing him from side to side. As soon as the lady directress considered that the impetus was sufficient, she said, "Now!" and away he went like a swallow, only to land, when his flying powers were exhausted, plump in the middle of the duck-pond.

Some ten seconds afterwards, a pillar of slimy mud arose and staggered towards the bank, where a crowd of little boys, each holding something offensive in his right hand, were eagerly awaiting its arrival. The squint-eyed woman contemplated the figure with the most intense satisfaction.

"He sold me up once," she murmured; "but we're quits now. That's it, lads, let him have it!"

But we will drop a veil over this too painful scene. Sir John Bellamy was unwell for some days afterwards; when he recovered he shook the dust of Roxham off his shoes for ever.

CHAPTER XX.

ANGELA'S VISION.

A FORTNIGHT or so afterwards, when the public excitement occasioned by the Caresfoot tragedy had been partially eclipsed by a particularly thrilling child-murder and suicide, a change for the better took place in Angela's condition. One night, after an unusually violent fit of raving, she suddenly went to sleep about twelve o'clock, and slept all that night and all the next day. About half-past nine on the following evening, the watchers in her room—namely, Pigott, Mr. Fraser, and Dr. Williamson, who was trying to make out what this deep sleep meant—were suddenly astonished at seeing her sit up in her bed in a listening attitude, as though she could hear something that interested her intensely, for the webbing that tied her down had been temporarily removed, and then hearing her cry, in a tone of the most living anguish, and yet with a world of passionate remonstrance in her voice—

“*Arthur, Arthur!*”

Then she sank down again for a few minutes. It was the same night that Mildred and Arthur sat together on the deck of the *Evening Star*. Presently she opened her eyes, and the doctor saw that there was no longer any madness in them, only great trouble. Her glance first fell upon Pigott.

“Run,” she said, “run and stop him; he cannot have gone far. Bring him back to me; quick, or he will be gone!”

“Whom do you mean, dear?”

“Arthur, of course—Arthur.”

"Hush, Angela!" said Mr. Fraser, "he has been gone a long time; you have been very ill."

She did not say anything, but turned her face to the pillow and wept, apparently as much from exhaustion as from any other cause, and then dropped off to sleep again.

"Her reason is saved," said Dr. Williamson, as soon as they were outside the door.

"Thanks be to Providence and you, doctor."

"Thanks to Providence alone. It is a case in which I could do little or nothing. It is a most merciful deliverance. All that you have to do now is to keep her perfectly quiet, and, above all, do not let her father come near her at present. I will call in and tell him. Lady Bellamy? Oh! about the same. She is a strange woman; she never complains, and rarely speaks—though twice I have heard her break out shockingly. There will never be any alteration in her case till the last alteration. Good-bye; I will look round to-morrow."

After this, Angela's recovery comparatively speaking, was rapid, though, of course, the effects of so severe a shock to the nervous system could not be shaken off in a day. Though she was no longer mad, she was still in a disturbed state of mind, and subject to strange dreams or visions. One in particular that visited her several nights in succession made a great impression upon her.

First, it would seem to her that she was wide awake in the middle of the night, and there would creep over her a sense of unmeasured space, infinite silence, and intense solitude. She would think that she was standing on a daïs at the end of a vast hall, down which ran endless rows of pillars supporting an inky sky which was the roof. There was no light in the hall, yet she could clearly see; there was no sound, but she could hear the

silence. Only a soft radiance shone from her eyes and brow. She was not afraid, though lonely, but she felt that something would presently come to make an end of solitude. And so she stood for many years or ages—she could not tell which—trying to fathom the mystery of that great place, and watching the light that streamed from her forehead strike upon the marble floor and pillars, or thread the darkness like a shooting star, only to reveal new depths of blackness beyond those it pierced. At length softly falling from the sky-roof which never stirred to any passing breeze, there came a flake of snow larger than a dove's wing; but it was blood-red, and in its centre shone a wonderful light that made its passage through the darkness a track of glory. As it passed gently downwards without sound, she thought that it threw the shadow of a human face. It lit upon the marble floor, and the red snow melted there and turned to blood, but the light that had been its heart shone on pure and steady.

Looking up again, she saw that the vault above her was thick with thousands upon thousands of these flakes, each glowing like a crimson lamp, and each throwing its own shadow. One of the shadows was like George, and she shuddered as it passed. And even as they touched the marble pavement, the flakes melted and became blood, and some of the lights went out, but the most part burnt on, till at length there was no longer any floor, but a dead-sea of blood on which floated a myriad points of fire.

And then it all grew clear to her, for a voice in her mind spoke and said that this was one of God's store-houses for human souls; that the light was the soul, and the red in the snow which turned to blood was the sin that during its earthly passage, had stained its first purity.

The sea of blood before her was the sum of the scarlet wickedness of her age; from every soul there came some to swell its awful waters.

At length the red snow ceased to fall, and a sound that was not a voice, but yet spoke, pealed through the silence, asking if all were ready. The voice that had spoken in her mind answered, "No, he has not come who is to see." Then, looking upwards, she saw miles on miles away, a bright being with half-shut wings flashing fast towards her, and she knew that it was Arthur, and the loneliness left her. He lit a breathing radiance by her side, and again the great sound pealed, "Let in the living waters, and cleanse away the sins of this generation."

It echoed and died away, and there followed a tumult like the flow of an angry sea. A mighty wind swept past her, and after it an ocean of molten crystal came rushing through the illimitable hall. The sea and the wind purged away the blood and put out the lamps, leaving behind them a glow of light like that upon her brow, and where the lamps had been stood myriads of seraphic beings, whilst from ten thousand tongues rang forth a pæan of celestial song.

Then everything vanished, and deep gloom, that was not, however, dark to her, settled round them. Taking Arthur by the hand, she spread her white wings and circled upwards. Far, far they sailed, till they reached a giant peak that split space in twain. Here they alighted, and watched the masses of cloud tearing through the gulfs on either side of them, and, looking beyond and below, gazed upon the shining worlds that peopled space beneath them.

From the cloud-drifts to the right and left came a noise as of the souging of many wings; but they did not know what caused it, till presently the vapours lifted, and they saw that alongside of and beneath them two separate streams of souls were passing on outstretched pinions: one stream, that to their left, proceeding to their earthly homes, and one, that to the right, returning from them. Those who went wore grief upon their shadowy faces, and had sad-coloured wings; but those who returned seemed for the most part happy, and their wings were tipped with splendour.

The never-ending stream that came flowed from a far-off glory, and that which returned, having passed the dividing cliff on which they stood, was changed into a multitude of the red snow-flakes with the glowing hearts, and dropped gently downwards.

So they stood, in happy peace, never tiring, from millennium to millennium. They watched new worlds collecting out of chaos, they saw them speed upon their high aerial course till, grown hoary, their foundation-rocks crumbling with age, they wasted away into the vastness whence they had gathered, to be replaced by fresh creations that in their turn took form, teemed with life, waxed, waned, and vanished.

At length there came an end, and the souging of wings was silent for ever; no more souls went downwards, and none came up from the earths. Then the distant glory from which the souls had come moved towards them with awful mutterings and robed in lightning, and space was filled with spirits, one of whom, sweeping past them, cried with a loud voice, "Children, Time is dead; now is the beginning of knowledge." And she

turned to Arthur, who had grown more radiant than the star which gleamed upon his forehead, and kissed him.

Then she would wake.

Time passed on, and gradually health and strength came back to Angela, till at last she was as powerful in mind, and—if that were possible—except that she was shorn of her lovely hair, more beautiful in body than she had been before her troubles overwhelmed her. Of Arthur she thought a great deal—indeed, she thought of little else; but it was with a sort of hopelessness that precluded action. Nobody had mentioned his name to her, as it was thought wiser not to do so, though Pigott and Mr. Fraser in as gentle terms as they could command, had told her of the details of the plot against her, and of the consequences to the principal actors in it. Nor had she spoken of him. It seemed to her that she had lost him for good, that he could never come back to her after what had passed, that he must hate her too much. She supposed that, in acting as he did, he was aware of all the circumstances of her marriage, and could find no excuses for her. She did not even know where he was, and, in her ignorance of the uses of private detectives and advertisements, had no idea how to find out. And so she suffered in silence, and only saw him in her dreams.

She still stopped at the vicarage with Pigott; nor had there as yet been any talk of her returning to the Abbey House. Indeed, she had not seen her father since the day of her marriage. But, now that she had recovered, she felt that something must be done about it. Wondering what it should be, one afternoon she walked to the churchyard, where she had not been since her illness,

and, once there, made her way naturally to her mother's grave. She was moving very quietly, and had almost reached the tree under which Hilda Caresfoot lay, when she became aware that there was already somebody kneeling by the grave, with his head rested against the marble cross.

It was her father. Her shadow falling upon him, he turned and saw her, and they stood looking at each other. She was shocked at the dreadful alteration in his face. It was now that of an old man, nearly worn out with suffering. He put his hand before his eyes and said,

"Angela, how can I face you, least of all here?"

For a moment the memory of her bitter wrongs swelled in her heart, for she now to a great extent understood what her father's part in the plot had been, and she regarded him in silence.

"Father," she said, presently, "I have been in the hands of God, and not in yours, and though you have helped to ruin my life, and have very nearly driven me into a madhouse, I can still say, let the past be the past. But why do you look so wretched? You should look happy; you have got the land—my price, you know," and she laughed a little bitterly.

"Why do I look wretched? Because I am given over to a curse that you cannot understand, and I am not alone. Where are those who plotted against you? George dead, Bellamy gone, Lady Bellamy paralysed hand and foot, and myself—although I did not plot, I only let them be—accursed. But, if you can forget the past, why do you not come back to my house? Of course I cannot force you; you are free and rich, and can suit yourself."

"I will come for a time if you wish—if I can bring Pigott with me."

"You may bring twenty Pigotts, for all I care—so long as you will pay for their board," he added, with a touch of his old miserliness. "But what do you mean 'for a time'?"

"I do not think I shall stop here long; I think that I am going into a sisterhood."

"Oh! well, you are your own mistress, and must do as you choose."

"Then I will come to-morrow," and they parted.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GUERDON OF JUDAS.

AND so on the following day Angela and Pigott returned to the Abbey House, but they both felt that it was a sad home-coming. Indeed, if there had been no other cause for melancholy, the sight of Philip's face was enough to excite it in the most happy-minded person. Not that Angela saw much of him, however, for they still kept to their old habit of not living together. All day her father was shut up in his room, transacting business that had reference to his accession of property and the settlement of George's affairs; for his cousin had died intestate, so he took his personalty and wound up the estate as heir-at-law. At night, however, he would go out and walk for miles, and in all weathers—he seemed to dread spending the dark hours at home.

When Angela had been back about a month in the old place, chance gave her a curious insight into her father's mental sufferings.

It so happened that one night, finding it impossible to sleep, and being much oppressed by sorrowful thoughts, she thought that she would read the hours away. But the particular book she wanted to find was downstairs, and it was two o'clock in the morning, and chilly in the passages. However, anything is better than sleeplessness, and the tyranny of sad thoughts and empty longings; so, throwing on her dressing-gown, she took a candle, and set off, thinking as she went how in this same guise she had fled before her husband.

She found her book, and was returning, when she

saw that there was still a light in her father's study, and that the door was ajar. At this moment it so happened that an unusually sharp draught, coming down one of the passages of the rambling old house, caught her candle and extinguished it. Making her way to the study-door, she pushed it open to see if anybody was there previous to asking for a light. At first she could see nobody. On the table, which was covered with papers, there stood two candles, a brandy-bottle, and a glass. She was just moving to the candle to get a light when her eye fell on what she at first believed to be a heap of clothes huddled together on the floor in the corner of the room. Further examination showed her that it was a man—she could distinctly see the backs of his hands. Her first idea was that she had surprised a thief, and she stopped, feeling frightened and not knowing what to do. Just then the bundle straightened itself a little and dropped its hands, revealing to her wondering gaze her own father's face, which wore the same awful look of abject fear which she had seen upon it when he passed through the hall beneath her just before Isleworth broke into flame on the night of her marriage. The eyes appeared to be starting from the sockets in an effort to clearly realise an undefinable horror, the hair, now daily growing greyer, was partially erect, and the pallid lips, half-opened, as though to speak words that would not come. He saw her too, but did not seem surprised at her presence. Covering up his eyes again with one hand, he shrank further back into his corner, and with the other pointed to a large leather arm-chair in which Pigott had told her her grandfather had died.

“Look there!” he whispered, hoarsely.

“Where, father? I see nothing.”

"There, girl, in the chair—look how it glares at me!"

Angela stood aghast. She was alarmed, in defiance of her own reason, and began to catch the contagion of superstition.

"This is dreadful," she said; "for heaven's sake tell me what is the matter."

Philip's ghastly gaze again fixed itself on the chair, and his teeth began to chatter.

"*Great God,*" he said, "*it is coming.*"

And, uttering a smothered cry, he fell on his face in a half faint. The necessity for action brought Angela to herself. Seizing the water-bottle, she splashed some water into her father's face. He came to himself almost instantly.

"Where am I?" he said. "Ah! I remember; I have not been quite well. You must not think anything of that. What are you doing down here at this time of night? Pass me that bottle," and he took nearly half a tumbler of raw brandy. "There, I am quite right again now; I had a bad attack of indigestion, that is all. Good night."

Angela went without a word. She understood now what her father had meant when he said that he was "accursed;" but she could not help wondering whether the brandy had anything to do with his "indigestion."

On the following day the doctor came to see her. It struck Angela that he came oftener than was necessary, the fact being that he would gladly have attended her gratis all the year round. A doctor does not often get the chance of visiting such a patient.

"You do not look quite so well to-day," he said.

"No," she answered, with a little smile; "I had bad dreams last night."

"Ah! I thought so. You should try to avoid that sort of thing; you are far too imaginative already."

"One cannot run away from one's dreams. Murder will out in sleep."

"Well, I have a message for you."

"Who from?"

"Lady Bellamy. You know that she is paralysed?"

"Yes."

"Well, she wants you to go and see her. Shall you go?"

Angela thought a little, and answered—

"Yes, I think so."

"You must be prepared to hear some bitter language if she speaks at all. Very likely she will beg you to get her some poison to kill herself with. I have been obliged to take the greatest precautions to prevent her from obtaining any. I am not very sensitive, but once or twice she has positively made me shiver with the things she says."

"She can never say anything more dreadful to me than she has said already, Dr. Williamson."

"Perhaps not. Go if you like. If you were revengeful—which I am sure you are not—you would have good reason to be satisfied at what you will see. Medically speaking, it is a sad case."

Accordingly, that very afternoon, Angela, accompanied by Pigott, started off for Rewtham House, where Lady Bellamy still lived, or rather existed. It was her first outing since the inquest on George Caresfoot had caused her and her history to become publicly notorious, and, as she walked along, she was surprised to find that she was the object of popular sympathy. Every man she met touched or took off his hat, according to his degree, and,

as soon as she had passed, turned round and stared at her. Some fine folks whom she did not know—indeed, she knew no one, though it had been the fashion to send and “inquire” during her illness—drove past in an open carriage and pair, and she saw a gentleman on the front seat whisper something to the ladies, bringing round their heads towards her as simultaneously as though they both worked on a single wire. Even the children coming out of the village school set up a cheer as she passed.

“Good gracious, Pigott, what is it all about?” she asked, at last.

“Well, you see, miss, they talk of you in the papers as the Abbey House heroine,—and heroines is rare in these parts.”

Overwhelmed with so much attention, Angela was thankful when at last they reached Rewtham House.

Pigott went into the housekeeper’s room, and Angela was at once shown up into the drawing-room. The servant announced her name to a black-robed figure lying on a sofa, and closed the door.

“Come here, Angela Caresfoot,” said a well-known voice, “and see how Fate has repaid the woman who tried to ruin you.”

She advanced and looked at the deathly face, still as darkly beautiful as ever, on which was fixed that strange look of wild expectancy that it had worn when its owner took the poison.

“Yes, look at me; think what I was, and then what I am, and learn how the Spirit of evil pays those who serve him. I thought to kill myself, but death was denied me, and now I live as you see me. I am an outcast from the society of my kind—not that I ever cared for that, except to rule it. I cannot stir hand or foot, I cannot

write, I can scarcely read, I cannot even die. My only resource is the bitter sea of thought that seethes eternally in this stricken frame like fire pent in the womb of a volcano. Yes, Angela Caresfoot, and like the fire, too, sometimes it overflows, and then I can blaspheme and rave aloud till my voice fails. That is the only power which is left to me."

Angela uttered an exclamation of pity.

"Pity—do not pity me; I will not be pitied by you. Mock me if you will; it is your turn now. You prophesied that it would come; now it is here."

"At any rate, you are still comfortable in your own house," said Angela, nervously anxious to turn the subject, and not knowing what to say.

"Oh! yes, I have money enough, if that is what you mean. My husband threatened to leave me destitute, but fear of public opinion—and I hear that he has run away, and is not well thought of now—or perhaps of myself, cripple as I am, caused him to change his mind. But do not let us talk of that poor creature. I sent for you here for a purpose. Where is your lover?"

Angela turned pale and trembled.

"What! do you not know, or are you tired of him?"

"Tired of him! I shall never be tired of him; but he has gone."

"Shall I tell you where to find him?"

"You would not if you could; you would deceive me again."

"No, oddly enough, I shall not. I have no longer any object in doing so. When I was bent upon marrying you to George Caresfoot, I lashed myself into hating you; now I hate you no longer, I respect you—indeed, I have done so all along."

"Then, why did you work me such a bitter wrong?"

"Because I was forced to. Believe me or not as you will, I am not going to tell you the story—at any rate, not now. I can only repeat that I was forced to."

"Where is Arthur?"

"In Madeira. Do you remember once telling me that you had only to lift your hand—so—ah! I forgot, I cannot lift mine—to draw him back to you, that no other woman in the world could keep him from you if you chose to bid him come?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Then, if you wish to get him back, you had better exercise your power, for he has gone to another woman."

"Who is she? What is she like?"

"She is a young widow—a Mrs. Carr. She is desperately in love with him—very beautiful and very rich."

"Beautiful! How do you mean? Tell me exactly what she is like."

"She has brown eyes, brown hair, a lovely complexion, and a perfect figure."

Angela glanced rapidly at her own reflection in the glass and sighed.

"Then I fear that I shall have no chance against her—none!"

"You are a fool! if you were alone in the same room with her, nobody would see her for looking at you."

Angela sighed again, this time from relief.

"But there is worse than that; very possible he has married her."

"Ah! then it is all over!"

"Why? If he loves you as much as you think, you can bring him back to you, married or unmarried."

"Perhaps. Yes, I think I could; but I would not."

"Why? If he loves you and you love him, you have a right to him. Among all the shams and fictions that we call laws, there is only one true—the law of Nature, by virtue of which you belong to each other."

"No, there is a higher law—the law of duty, by means of which we try to curb the impulses of Nature. The woman who has won him has a right to consideration."

"Then, to gratify a foolish prejudice, you are prepared to lose him for ever?"

"No, Lady Bellamy; if I thought that I was to lose him for ever, I might be tempted to do what is wrong in order to be with him for a time; but I do not think that. I only lose him for a time that I may gain him for ever. In this world he is separated from me; in the worlds to come my rights will assert themselves, and we shall be together, and never part any more."

Lady Bellamy looked at her wonderingly, for her eyes could still express her emotions.

"You are a fine creature," she said; "and, if you believe that, perhaps it will be true for you, since Faith must be the measure of realisation. But, after all, he may not have married her. That will be for you to find out."

"How can I find out?"

"By writing to him, of course—to the care of Mrs. Carr, Madeira. That is sure to find him."

"Thank you. How can I thank you enough?"

"It seems to me that you owe me few thanks. You are always foolish about what tends to secure your own happiness, or you would have thought of this before."

There was a pause, and then Angela rose to go.

"Are you going? Yes, go. I am not fit company for such as you. Perhaps we shall not meet again: but, in thinking of all the injury that I have done you, remember that my punishment is proportionate to my sin. They tell me that I may live for years."

Angela gazed at the splendid wreck beneath her, and an infinite pity swelled in her gentle heart. Stooping, she kissed her on the forehead. A wild astonishment filled Lady Bellamy's great, dark eyes.

"Child, child, what are you doing? you do not know what I am, or you would not kiss me!"

"Yes, Lady Bellamy," she said quietly, "I do, that is, I know what you have been; but I want to forget that. Perhaps you will one day be able to forget it too. I do not wish to preach, but, perhaps, after all, this terrible misfortune may lead you to something better. Thank God, there is forgiveness for us all."

Her words touched some forgotten chord in the stricken woman's heart, and two big tears rolled down the frozen cheeks. They were the first Anne Bellamy had wept for many a day.

"Your voice," she said, "has a music that awakes the echoes from a time when I was good and pure like you, but that time has gone for ever."

"Surely, Lady Bellamy, the heart that can remember it can also strive to reach another like it. If you have descended the cliff whence those echoes spring, into a valley however deep, there is still another cliff before you that you may climb."

"It is easy to descend, but we need wings to climb. Look at me, Angela; my body is not more crippled and shorn of power than my dark spirit is of wings. How can *I* climb?"

Angela bent low beside her and whispered a few words in her ear, then rose with a shy blush upon her face. Lady Bellamy shut her eyes. Presently she opened them again.

"Do not speak any more of this to me now," she said. "I must have time. The instinct of years cannot be brushed away in a day. If you knew all the sins I have committed, perhaps you would think too that for such as I am there is no forgiveness and no hope."

"Whilst there is life there is hope, and, as I once heard Mr. Fraser say, the real key to forgiveness is the desire to be forgiven."

Again Lady Bellamy shut her eyes and thought, and, when she drew up their heavy lids, Angela saw that there was something of a peaceful look about them.

"Stand so," she said to Angela, "there where the light falls upon your face. That will do; now shall I tell you what I read there? On your forehead sit power to grasp, and almost measureless capacity to imagine; in your eyes there is a sympathy not to be guessed by beings of a coarser fibre; those eyes could look at Heaven and not be dazzled. Your whole face speaks of a purity and single-mindedness which I can read but cannot understand. Your mind rejects the bubbles that men follow, and seeks the solid truth. Your spirit is in tune with things of light and air; it can float to the heights of our mental atmosphere, and thence can almost gaze into the infinite beyond. Pure, but not cold, thirsting for a wider knowledge, and at times breathing the air of a higher world; resolute, but patient; proud, and yet humble to learn; holy, but aspiring; conscious of gifts you do not know how to use, girl, you rise as near to what is divine

as a mortal may. I have always thought so, now I am sure of it."

"Lady Bellamy!"

"Hush! I have a reason for what I say. I do not ask you to waste time by listening to senseless panegyrics. Listen: I will tell you what I have never told a living soul before. For years I have been a student of a lore almost forgotten in this country—a lore which once fully acquired will put the powers that lie hid in Nature at the command of its possessor, that will even enable him to look beyond Nature, and perhaps, so far as the duration of existence is concerned, for awhile to triumph over it. That lore you can learn, though it baffled me. My intellect and determination enabled me to find the cues to it, and to stumble on some of its secrets, but I could not follow them; too late I learnt that only the good and pure can do that. Much of the result of years of toil I destroyed the other night, but I still know enough to empower you to reconstruct what I annihilated; you can learn more in one year than I learnt in ten. I am grateful to you, and, if you wish it, I will show you the way."

Angela listened, open-eyed. Lady Bellamy was right; she was greedy of knowledge and the power that springs from knowledge.

"But would it not be wrong?" she said.

"There can be nothing wrong in what the ruling Wisdom allows us to acquire without the help of what is evil. But do not be deceived, such knowledge and power as this is not a thing to be trifled with. To obtain a mastery over it, you must devote your life to it; you must give it

"Allegiance whole, not strained to suit desire."

No earthly passion must come to trouble the fixed serenity of your aspirations; that was one, but only one, of the reasons of my failure. You must leave your Arthur to Mrs. Carr, and henceforward put him as much out of your mind as possible; and this that you may be able to separate yourself from earthly bonds and hopes and fears. Troubled waters reflect a broken image."

"I must, then, choose between this knowledge and my love?"

"Yes; and you will do well if you choose the knowledge; for, before you die you will be more of an angel than a woman. On the one hand, then, this proud and dizzy destiny awaits you; on the other, every-day joys and sorrows shared by all the world, and an ordinary attachment to a man against whom I have, indeed, nothing to say, but who is not your equal, and who is, at the best, full of weaknesses that you should despise."

"But, Lady Bellamy, his weaknesses are a part of himself, and I love him all, just as he is; weakness needs love more than what is strong."

"Perhaps; but, in return for your love, I offer you no empty cup. I do not ask you to follow fantastic theories—of that I will soon convince you."

"No, Lady Bellamy, no, I have chosen. You offer, after years of devotion, to make me *almost like an angel*. The temptation is very great, and it fascinates me. But I hope, if I can succeed in living a good life, to become altogether an angel when I die. Why, then I should attempt to filch fragments of a knowledge that will one day be all my own?—if, indeed, it is right to do so. Whilst I am here, Arthur's love is more to me than such knowledge can ever be. If he is married, I may learn to think differently, and try to soothe my mind by forcing

it to run in these hidden grooves. Till then, I choose Arthur and my petty hopes and fears; for, after all, they are the natural heritage of my humanity."

Lady Bellamy thought for awhile, and answered—

"I begin to think that the great Power who made us has mixed even His most perfect works with an element of weakness, lest they should soar too high, and see too far. The prick of a pin will bring a balloon to earth, and an earthly passion, Angela, will prevent you from soaring to the clouds. So be it. You have had your chance. It is only one more disappointment."

CHAPTER XXII.

ANGELA'S LETTER.

ANGELA went home very thoughtful. The next two days she spent in writing. First, she wrote a clear and methodical account of all the events which had happened since Arthur's first departure, more than a year ago, and attached to it copies of the various documents that had passed between herself and George, including one of the undertaking that her husband had signed before the marriage. This account was in the form of a statement which she signed, and, taking it to Mr. Fraser, read it to him, and asked him to sign it too. It took her two whole days to write, and, when it was done, she labelled it "to be read first." On the third day she wrote the following letter to go with the statement—

"For the first time in my life, Arthur, I take up my pen to write to you, and in truth the difficulty of the task before me, as well as my own want of skill, tend to bewilder me, and, though I have much upon my mind to say, I scarcely know if it will reach you in an intelligible form—if, indeed, this letter is ever destined to lie open in your hands.

"The statement that I enclose, however—in case you do not already know them—will tell you all the details of what has happened since you left me more than a year ago. From it you will learn how cruelly I was deceived into marrying George Caresfoot, believing you dead. Oh! through all time, never shall I forget that fearful night, nor cease to thank God for my merciful escape from the fiend whom I have married. And then

came the morning, and brought you—the dead—alive before my eyes. And whilst I stood in the first tumult of my amaze—forgetful of everything but that it was you, dear Arthur, no spirit, but you in flesh and blood—whilst I yet stood thus, stricken to silence by the shock of an unutterable fear and joy, you broke upon me with those dreadful words, so that I choked, feeling how just they must seem to you, and could not answer.

“And yet it sometimes fills me with wonder and indignation to think of them; wonder that you could believe me so mad as to throw away the love of my life, and indignation that you could deem me so lost as to dishonour it. They drove me mad, those words, and from that moment forward I remember nothing but a chaos of the mind heaving endlessly like the sea. But all this has passed, and I am thankful to say that I am quite well again now.

“Still, I should not have written to you, Arthur; I did not even know where you were, and I never thought of recovering you. After what has passed, I looked upon you as altogether lost to me for this world. But a few days ago I went at her own request to see Lady Belamy. All she said to me I will not now repeat, lest I should render this letter too wearisome to read, though a great deal of it was strange enough to be well worth repetition. In the upshot, however, she said that I had better write to you, and told me where to write. And so I write to you, dear. There was also another thing that she told me of sad import for myself, but which I must not shrink to face. She said that there lived at Madeira, where you are, a lady who is in love with you, and who is herself both beautiful and wealthy, to whom you would

have gone for comfort in your trouble and, in all probability, have married.

"Now, Arthur I do not know if this is the case, but if so, I hasten to say that I do not blame you. You smarted under what must have seemed to you an intolerable wrong, and you went for consolation to her who had it to offer. In a man that is perhaps natural, though it is not a woman's way. If it be so, I say from my heart, be as happy as you can. But remember what I told you long ago, and do not fall into any delusions on the matter; do not imagine that because circumstances have shaped themselves thus, therefore I am to be put out of your mind and forgotten, for this is not so. I cannot be forgotten, though for a while I may justly be discarded; it is possible that for this world you have passed out of my reach, but in the next I shall claim you as my own.

"Yes, Arthur, I have made up my mind to lose you for this life as a fitting reward for my folly. But do not think that I do so without a pang, for, believe me, since my mind emerged stronger and clearer from the storms through which it has passed, bringing back to me the full life and strength of my womanhood, I have longed for you with an ever-increasing longing. I am not ashamed to own that I desire to feel your arms about me and your kiss upon my lips. Why should I be? Am I not yours, body and soul?

"But, dear, it has been given to me, perhaps as a compensation for all I have undergone, and that is still left for me to undergo, to grasp a more enduring end than that of earthly ecstasy: for I can look forward with a confident assurance to the day when we shall embrace upon the threshold of the Infinite. Do not call this

foolish imagination, or call it imagination if you will—for what is imagination? Is it not the connecting link between us and our former and future state, the scent of heaven yet clinging to our souls, and recalling memories of our home? Imagination, what would our higher life be without it? It is what the mind is to the body, it is the soul's *thought*.

“So in my imagination—since I know no better term—I foresee that heavenly hour, and I am not jealous for the earthly moment. Nor, indeed, have I altogether lost you, for at indefinite times, in the stillness of the night, when the body is plunged in sleep, my spirit, freed from the thralldom of the senses, has the power to summon your beloved form to its presence, and in this communion Nature vindicates her faithfulness. Thus, through the long night, rest comes upon me with your presence.

“And at last there will come a greater rest; at length—having lived misunderstood—we shall die, alone, and then the real life or lives will begin. It is not always night, for Dawn is set beyond the night, and through the gates of Dawn we shall journey to the day. It is not always night; even in the womb of darkness throbs the promise of the morning. I often wonder, Arthur, how and what this change will be. Shall we be even as we are, but still, through unnumbered ages, grow slowly on to the Divine; or, casting off the semblance of mortality, shall we rise at one wide sweep to the last pinnacle of time, there to learn the purposes and mark the measure of our being?

“How can I know? But this I believe, that whatever the change, however wide and deep the darkness which stretches between what is and what is not yet, we cannot lose ourselves therein. Identity will still be ours, and

memory, the Janus-headed, will still pursue us, calling to our minds the enacted evil and that good which, having been, must always be. For we are immortal, and though we put off the mortal dress—yes, though our forms become as variable as the clouds, and assume proportions of which we cannot dream—yet shall memory companion us and identity remain. For we are each fashioned apart for ever, and built about with such an iron wall of individual life that all the force of time and change cannot so much as shake it. And while I am myself, and yet in any shape endure, of this be certain—the love that is a part of me will endure also. Herein is set my hope—nay, not my hope, for hope upon the tongue whispers of doubt within the heart, but the most fixed unchanging star of all my heaven. It is not always night, for the Dawn is set beyond the night; and oh! my heart's beloved, at day-break we shall meet again!

“Arthur, even now I long for the perfect light and sympathy of that vast Hereafter, when the sense of knowledge shall scarcely find a limit ere it overleaps it; when strength shall radiate from our being, and living on together through Existences, Periods, and Spheres, we shall progress from majesty to majesty, and, seeing into each other's souls, shall learn what love's communion is!

“Do not think me foolish, dear, for speaking to you thus. I do not wish to make you the victim of an outburst of thought that you may think hysterical. But perhaps I may never be able to write to you again in this way; your wife, if you are married, may be jealous, or other things may occur to prevent it. I feel it, therefore, necessary to tell you my inmost thoughts now whilst I can, so that you may always remember them during the long coming years, and especially when you draw

near to the end of our journey. I hope, dearest Arthur, that nothing will ever make you forget them, and also, for the sake of the pure love you will for ever bear me, that you will always live up to your noblest and your best, for in this way our meeting shall be made more perfect.

"Of course it is possible that you may still be free, and, after you know that I am not quite so much to blame as you may have thought, still willing to give your name to me. It is a happy hope, but I scarcely dare to dwell upon it.

"The other day I was reading a book Mr. Fraser lent me, which took my fancy very much, it was so full of contradictions. The unexpected always happened in it, and there was both grief and laughter in its pages. It did not end quite well or quite badly, or, rather, it had *no* end, and deep down underneath the plotless story, only peeping up now and again when the actors were troubled, there ran a vein of real sorrow and sad, unchanging love. There was a hero in this odd book which was so like life—who, by the way, was no hero at all, but a curious, restless creature, who seemed to have missed his mark in life, and went along looking for old truths and new ideas with his eyes so fixed upon the stars that he was always stumbling over the pebbles in his path, and thinking that they were rocks. He was a sensitive man, too, and as weak as he was sensitive, and often fell into pitfalls and did what he should not, and yet, for all that, he had a quaint and gentle mind, and there was something to like in him—at least, so thought the women in that book. There was a heroine, too, who was all that a heroine should be, very sweet and very beautiful, and she really had a heart, only she would not let it beat. And of course the hero and heroine loved

each other: of course, too, they both behaved badly, and things went wrong, or there would have been no book.

"But I tell you this story because once, in a rather touching scene, this hero who made such a mess of things set forth one of the ideas that he had found, and thought new, but which was really so very old. He told the heroine that he had read in the stars that happiness has only one key, and that its name is 'Love,' that, amidst all the mutabilities and disillusiones of our life, the pure love of a man and woman alone stands firm and beautiful, alone defies change and disappointment; that it is the heaven-sent salve for all our troubles, the remedy for our mistakes, the magic glass reflecting only what is true and good. But in the end her facts overcame his theories, and he might have spared himself the trouble of telling. And for all his star-gazing, this hero had no real philosophy, but in his grief and unresting pain went and threw himself into the biggest pitfalls that he could find, and would have perished there, had not a good angel come and dragged him out again and brushed the mud off his clothes, and, taking him by the hand, led him along a safer path. And so for awhile he drops out of the story, which says that, when he is not thinking of the lost heroine, he is perhaps happier than he deserves to be.

"Now, Arthur, I think that this foolish hero was right, and the sensible heroine he worshipped so blindly, wrong.

"If you are still unmarried, and still care to put his theories to the test, I believe, that we also can make as beautiful a thing of our lives as he thought that he and his heroine could, and, ourselves supremely happy in each other's perfect love, may perhaps be able to add to the happiness of some of our fellow-travellers. That is,

I think, as noble an end as a man and woman can set before themselves.

"But if, on the other hand, you are tied to this other woman who loves you by ties that cannot be broken, or which honour will not let you break; or if you are unforgiving, and no longer wish to marry me as I wish to marry you, then till that bright hour of immortal hope—farewell! Yes, Arthur, farewell till the gate of Time has closed for us—till, in the presence of God our Father, I shall for ever call you mine!

"Alas! I am so weak that my tears fall as I write the word. Perhaps I may never speak or write to you again, so once more, my dearest, my beloved, my earthly treasure and my heavenly hope, farewell! May the blessing of God be as constantly around you as my thoughts, and may He teach you that these are not foolish words, but rather the faint echo of an undying truth!

"I send back the ring that was used to trick me with. Perhaps, whatever happens, you will wear it for my sake. It is, you know, a symbol of Eternity.

"ANGELA CARESFOOT."

CHAPTER XXIII.

HARD LABOUR AT THE DOCKS.

JUST as Angela was engaged in finishing her long letter to Arthur—surely one of the strangest ever written by a girl to the man she loved—Mr. Fraser was reading an epistle which had reached him by that afternoon's post. We will look over his shoulder, and see what was in it.

It was a letter dated from the vicarage of one of the poorest parishes in the great Dock district in the east of London. It began—

“DEAR SIR,

“I shall be only too thankful to entertain your proposal for an exchange of livings, more especially as, at first sight, it would seem that all the advantage is on my side. The fact is, that the incessant strain of work here has at last broken down my health to such a degree, that the doctors tell me plainly I must choose between the comparative rest of a country parish, or the certainty of passing to a completer quiet before my time. Also, now that my children are growing up, I am very anxious to remove them from the sights and sounds and tainted moral atmosphere of the poverty-stricken and degraded quarter.

“But, however that may be, I should not be doing my duty to you, if I did not warn you that this is no parish for a man of your age to undertake, unless for strong reasons (for I see by the Clergy List that you are a year or so older than myself). The work is positively ceaseless, and often of a most shocking and thankless

character; and there are almost no respectable inhabitants; for nobody lives in the parish, except those who are too poor to live elsewhere. The stipend, too, is, as you are aware, not large. However, if, in face of these disadvantages, you still entertain the idea of an exchange, perhaps we had better. . . ."

The letter then entered into details.

"I think that will suit me very well," said Mr. Fraser, aloud to himself, as he put it down. "It will not greatly matter if my health does break down; and I ought to have gone along ago. 'Positively ceaseless,' he says the work is. Well, ceaseless work is the only thing that can stifle thought. And yet it will be hard, coming up by the roots after all these years. Ah me! this is a queer world, and a sad one for some of us! I will write to the bishop at once."

From which it will be gathered that things had not been going well with Mr. Fraser.

Meanwhile, Angela put her statement and the accompanying letter into a large envelope. Then she took the queer emerald ring off her finger, and, as there was nobody looking, she kissed it, and wrapped it up in a piece of cotton-wool, and stowed it away in the letter, and sealed it up. Next she addressed it, in her clear miniature handwriting, to

"Arthur P. Heigham, Esq.,

"Care of Mrs. Carr,

Madeira,"

as Lady Bellamy had told her; and, calling to Pigott to come with her, started off to the post-office to register

and post her precious packet, for the Madeira mail left Southampton on the morrow.

She had just time to reach the office, affix the three shillings' worth of stamps that the letter took, and register it, when the postman came up, and she saw it stamped and bundled into his bag with the others, just as though it were nothing, instead of her whole life depending on it. And away it went on its journey, as much beyond recall as yesterday's sins.

"And so you have been a-writing to him, Miss?" said Pigott, as soon as they were out of the office.

"Yes, Pigott," and she told her what Lady Bellamy had said. She listened attentively, with a shrewd twinkle in her eyes.

"I'm thinking, dearie, that it's a pity you didn't post yourself, that's the best letter; it can't make no mistakes, nor fall into the hands of them it isn't meant for."

"What can you mean?"

"I'm thinking, miss, that change of air is a wonderful good thing after sickness, especially sea-air," answered Pigott, oracularly.

"I don't in the least understand you. Really, Pigott, you drive me wild with your parables."

"Lord, dear, for all you're so clever you never could see half an inch into a brick wall, and that with my meaning as clear as a haystack in a thunderstorm."

This last definition quite finished Angela. Why, she wondered, should a haystack be clearer in a thunderstorm than at any other time. She looked at her companion helplessly, and was silent.

"Bless me, what I have been telling, as plain as plain can be, is, why don't you go to this Mad—Mad—what's the name?—I never can think of them foreign names.

I'm like Jakes and the flowers: he says the smaller and 'footier' they are, the longer the name they sticks on to them, just to puzzle a body who——"

"Madeira," suggested Angela, with the calmness of despair.

"Yes, that's it—Madeiry. Well, why don't you go to Madeiry along with your letter to look after Mr. Arthur? Like enough he is in a bit of a mess there. So far as I know anything about their ways, young men always are, in a general sort of way, for everlasting a-caterwauling after some one or other, for all the world like a tom on the tiles, more especially if they are in love with somebody else. But, dear me, a sensible woman don't bother her head about that. She just goes and hooks them out of it, and then she knows where they are, and keeps them there."

"Oh, Pigott, never mind all these reflections, though I'm sure I don't know how you can think of such things. The idea of comparing poor dear Arthur with a tom-cat! But tell me, how can I go to Madeira? Supposing that he is married?"

"Well, then you would learn all about it for yourself, and no gammoning; and there'd be an end to it, one way or the other."

"But would it be quite modest, to run after him like that?"

"Modest, indeed! And why shouldn't a young lady travel for her health? I have heard say that this Madeiry is a wonderful place for the stomach."

"The lungs, Pigott—the lungs."

"Well, then, the lungs. But it don't matter; they ain't far off each other."

"But, Pigott, whom could I go with? I could not go alone."

"Go with? Why me, of course."

"I can hardly fancy you at sea, Pigott."

"And why not, Miss? I daresay I shall do as well as other folk there; and if I do go to the bottom, as seems likely, there's plenty of room for a respectable person there, I should hope. Look here, dear. You'll never be happy unless you marry Mr. Arthur; so don't you go and throw away a chance, just out of foolishness, and for fear of what folks say. That's how dozens of women make a mess of it. Folks say one thing to-day and another to-morrow, but you'll remain you for all that. Maybe he's married; and, if so, it's a bad business, and there's an end of it; but maybe, too, he isn't. As for that letter, as likely as not the Other One will put it in the fire. I should, I doubt, if I were in her shoes. So don't you lose any time, for, if he isn't married, it's like enough he soon will be."

Angela felt that there was sense in what the old nurse said, though the idea was a new one to her, and it made her thoughtful.

"I'll think about it," she said, presently. "I wonder what Mr. Fraser would say about it."

"Perhaps one thing, and perhaps another. He's good and kind, but he hasn't got much head for these sort of things, he's always thinking of something else. Just look what a fool Squire George—may he twist and turn in his grave!—made of him. You ask him, if you like; but you be guided by yourself, dearie. Your head is worth six Reverend Fraser's when you bring it to a thing. But I must be off, and count the linen."

That evening, after tea, Angela went down to Mr.

Fraser's. He was directing an envelope to the Lord Bishop of his diocese when she entered; but he hurriedly put it away in the blotting-paper.

"Well, Angela, did you get your letter off?"

"Yes, Mr. Fraser, it was just in time to catch the mail to-morrow. But, do you know, that is what I want to speak to you about. Pigott thinks that, under all the circumstances"—here Angela hesitated a little—"she and I had better go to Madeira and find out how things stand, and I almost think that she is right."

"Certainly," answered Mr. Fraser, rising and looking out of the window. "You have a great deal at stake."

"You do not think that it would be immodest?"

"My dear Angela, when in such a case as this a woman goes to seek the man she loves, and whom she believes loves her, I do not myself see where there is room for immodesty."

"No, nor do I, and I do love him so very dearly; he is all my life to me."

Mr. Fraser winced visibly.

"What is the matter! have you got a headache?"

"Nothing, only a twinge here," and he pointed to his heart.

Angela looked alarmed; she took a womanly interest in anybody's ailments.

"I know what it is," she said. "Widow James suffers from it. You must take it in hand at once, or it will become chronic after meals, as hers is."

Mr. Fraser smiled grimly as he answered—

"I am afraid that I have neglected it too long—it has become chronic already. But about Madeira; have you, then, made up your mind to go?"

"Yes, I think that I shall go. If he—is married, you

know—I can always come back again, and perhaps Pigott is right; the letter might miscarry, and there is so much at stake.”

“When shall you go, then?”

“By the next steamer, I suppose. They go every week, I think I will tell my father that I am going to-morrow.”

“Ah! you will want money, I suppose.”

“No, I believe that I have plenty of money of my own now.”

“Oh! yes, under your marriage settlement, no doubt. Well, my dear, I am sure I hope that your journey will not be in vain. Did I tell you I have also written to Mr. Heigham by this mail, and told him all I knew about the matter?”

“That is very kind and thoughtful of you; it is just like you,” answered Angela, gently.

“Not at all, not at all; but you have never told me how you got on with Lady Bellamy—that is, except what she told you about Mr. Heigham.”

“Oh! it was a strange interview. What do you think she wanted to teach me?”

“I have not the faintest idea.”

“Magic.”

“Nonsense.”

“Yes, she did; she told me that she could read all sorts of things in my face, and offered, if I would give myself up to it, to make me more than human.”

“Pshaw! it was a bit of charlatanism; she wanted to frighten you.”

“No, I think she believed what she said, and I think that she has some sort of power. She seemed disappointed when I refused, and, do you know, if it had not

been for Arthur, I do not think that I should have refused, I love power, or rather knowledge; but then I love Arthur more."

"And why is he incompatible with knowledge?"

"I do not know; but she said that, to triumph over the mysteries she wished to teach me, I must free myself from earthly love and cares. I told her that, if Arthur is married, I would think of it."

"Well, Angela, to be frank, I do not believe in Lady Bellamy's magic, and, if its practice brings people to what she is, I think it is best left alone; indeed, I expect that the whole thing is a delusion arising from her condition. But I think she is right when she told you that to become a mistress of her art—or, indeed, of any noble art—you must separate yourself from earthly passions. I owe your Arthur a grudge as well as Lady Bellamy. I hoped, Angela, to see you rise like a star upon this age of insolence and infidelity. I wanted you to be a great woman; but that dream is all over now."

"Why, Mr. Fraser?"

"Because, my dear, both history and observation teach us that great gifts like yours partake of the character of an accident in a woman; they are not natural to her, and she does not wear such jewels easily—they put her outside of her sex. It is something as though a man were born into the world with wings. At first he would be very proud of them, and go sailing about in the sky to the admiration of the crowds beneath him; but by-and-by he would grow tired of flying alone, and after all, it is not necessary to fly to transact the ordinary business of the world. And perhaps at last he would learn to love somebody without wings, somebody who could not fly, and he would always want to be with her down on the

homely earth, and not alone up in the heavenly heights. If a woman had all the genius of Plato or all the learning of Solomon, it would be forgotten at the touch of a baby's fingers.

"Well, well, we cannot fight against human nature, and I daresay that in a few years you will forget that you can read Greek as well as you can English, and were very near finding out a perfect way of squaring the circle. Perhaps it is best so. Lady Bellamy may have read a great many fine things in your face. Shall I tell you what I read there? I read that you will marry your Arthur, and become a happy wife and a happier mother; that your life will be one long story of unassuming kindness, and that, when at last you die, you will become a sacred memory in many hearts. That is what I read. The only magic you will ever wield, Angela, will be the magic of your goodness."

"Who knows? We cannot read the future," she answered.

"And so you are going to Madeira next week. Then, this will be the last time that we shall meet—before you go, I mean—for I am off to London to-morrow, for a while, on some business. When next we meet, if we do meet again, Angela, you will be a married woman. Do not start, dear; there is nothing shocking about that. But, perhaps, we shall not meet any more."

"Oh, Mr. Fraser! why do you say such dreadful things?"

"There is nothing dreadful about it, Angela, I am getting on in life, and am not so strong as I was; and you are both young and strong, and must in the ordinary course of things outlive me for many years. But, whatever happens, my dear, I know that you always keep a

warm corner in your memory for your old master; and, as for me, I can honestly say, that to have known and taught you has been the greatest privilege of a rather lonely life."

Here Angela began to cry.

"Don't cry, my dear. There is, thank God, another meeting-place than this, and, if I reach the shore of that great future before you, I shall—but there, my dear, it is time for you to be going home. You must not stop here to listen to this melancholy talk. Go home, Angela, and think about your lover. I am busy to-night. Give me a kiss, dear, and go."

Presently, she was gone, and he heard the front-door close behind her. He went to the window, and watched the tall form gradually growing fainter in the gloaming, till it vanished altogether."

Then he came back, and, sitting down at his writing-table, rested his grizzled head upon his hand and thought. Presently he raised it, and there was a sad smile flickering round the wrinkles of the nervous mouth.

"And now for 'hard labour at the London docks,'" he said, aloud.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BACK AT THE QUINTA CARR.

NOTHING occurred to mar the prosperity of the voyage of the *Evening Star*. That beautiful little vessel declined to simplify the course of this history by going to the bottom with Mildred and Arthur, as the imaginative reader may have perhaps expected. She did not even get into a terrific storm, in order to give Arthur the opportunity of performing heroic feats, and the writer of this history the chance of displaying a profound knowledge of the names of ropes and spars. On the contrary, she glided on upon a sea so still that even Miss Terry was persuaded to arouse herself from her torpor, and come upon deck, till at last, one morning, the giant peak of Teneriffe, soaring high above its circling clouds, broke upon the view of her passengers.

Here they stopped for a week or so, enjoying themselves very much in their new surroundings, till at length Arthur grew tired of the islands, which was of course the signal for their departure. So they returned, reaching Madeira after an absence of close upon a month. As they dropped anchor in the little bay, Mildred came up to Arthur, and, touching him with that gentle deference which she always showed towards him, asked if he was not glad to be home again.

"Home!" he said. "I have no home."

"Oh, Arthur!" she answered, "why do you try to pain me? Is not my home yours also?"

So soon as they landed, he started off down to

"Miles' Hotel," to see if any letters had come for him during his absence, and returned, looking very much put out.

"What is the matter, Arthur?" asked Miss Terry, once again happy at feeling her feet upon solid soil.

"Why, those idiots at the hotel have returned a letter sent to me by my lawyer. They thought that I had left Madeira for good, and the letter was marked, 'If left, return to Messrs. Borley and Son,' with the address. And the mail went out this afternoon into the bargain, so it will be a month before I can get it back again."

Had Arthur known that this letter contained clippings of the newspaper reports of the inquest on George Caresfoot, of whose death even he was in total ignorance, he would have had good reason to be put out.

"Never mind, Arthur," said Mildred's clear voice at his elbow—she was rarely much further from him than his shadow; "lawyers' letters are not, as a rule, very interesting. I never yet had one that would not keep. Come and see if your pavilion— isn't that a grand name? —is arranged to your liking, and then let us go to dinner, for Agatha here is dying of hunger—she has to make up for her abstinence at sea."

"I was always told," broke in that lady, "that yachting was charming, but I tell you frankly I have never been more miserable in my life than I was on board your *Evening Star*."

"Never mind, dear, you shall have a nice long rest before we start for the coast of Spain."

And so Arthur soon settled down again into the easy tenor of Madeira life. He now scarcely made a pretence of living at the hotel, since, during their cruise, Mildred had caused a pavilion which stood in the garden to be

luxuriously fitted up for his occupation. Here he was happy enough in a dull, numb way, and, as the days went on, something of the old light came back to his eyes, and his footfall again grew quick and strong as when it used to fall in the corridors of the Abbey House. Of the past he never spoke, nor did Mildred ever allude to Angela after that conversation at sea. She contented herself with attempting to supplant her, and to a certain extent she was successful. No man for very long could have remained obdurate to such beauty and such patient devotion, and it is not wonderful that he grew in a way to love her.

But there was this peculiarity about the affair—namely, that the affection which he bore her was born more of her stronger will than of his own feelings, as was shown by the fact, so long as he was actually with her and within the circle of her influence, that her power over him was predominant; but, the moment that he was out of her sight, his thoughts would fall back into their original channels, and the old sores would begin to run. However much, too, he might be successful in getting the mastery of his troubles by day, at night they would assert themselves, and from the constant and tormenting dreams which they inspired he could find no means of escape.

For at least four nights out of every seven, from the moment that he closed his eyes till he opened them again in the morning, it would seem to him that he had been in the company of Angela, under every possible variety of circumstance, talking to her, walking with her, meeting her suddenly or unexpectedly in crowded places, or at dinner-parties—always her, and no one else—till at last poor Arthur began to wonder if his spirit took leave of

his body in sleep and went to seek her, and, what is more, found her. Or was it nothing but a fantasy? He could not tell; but, at any rate, it was a fact, and it would have been hard to say if it distressed or rejoiced him most.

Occasionally, too, he would fall into a fit of brooding melancholy that would last him for a day or two, and which Mildred would find it quite impossible to dispel. Indeed, when he got in that way, she soon discovered that the only thing to do was to leave him alone. He was suffering acutely, there was no doubt about that, and when any animal suffers, including man, it is best left in solitude. A sick or wounded beast always turns out of the herd to recover or die.

When Mildred saw him in this state of mental desolation, she would shake her head and sigh, for it told her that she was as far as ever from the golden gate of her Eldorado. As has been said, hers was the strongest will, and, even if he had not willed it, she could have married him any day she wished; but, odd as it may seem, she was too conscientious. She had determined that she would not marry him unless she was certain that he loved her, and to this resolution, as yet, she firmly held. Whatever her faults may have been, Mildred Carr had all the noble unselfishness that is so common in her sex. For herself and her own reputation she cared, comparatively speaking, nothing; whilst for Arthur's ultimate happiness she was very solicitous.

One evening—it was one of Arthur's black days, when he had got a fit of what Mildred called "Angela fever"—they were walking together in the garden, Arthur in silence, with his hands in his pockets, and his pipe in his mouth, and Mildred humming a little tune by way of

amusing herself, when they came to the wall that edged the precipice. Arthur leant over it and gazed at the depths below.

"Don't, dear; you will tumble over," said Mildred in some alarm.

"I think it would be a good thing if I did," he answered, moodily.

"Are you, then, so tired of the world—and me?"

"No, dear, I am not tired of you; forgive me, Mildred, but I am dreadfully miserable. I know that it is very ungracious and ungrateful of me, but it is the fact."

"You are thinking of *her* again, Arthur?"

"Yes, I have got a fit of it. I suppose that she has not been out of my mind for an hour together during the last forty-eight hours. Talk of being haunted by a dead person, it is infinitely worse to be haunted by a living one."

"I am very sorry for you, dear."

"Do you suppose, Mildred, that this will go on for all my life, that I shall always be at the mercy of these bitter memories and thoughts?"

"I don't know, Arthur. I hope not."

"I wish I were dead—I wish I were dead!" he broke out, passionately. "She has destroyed my life, all that was happy in me is dead, only my body lives on. I am sure I don't know, Mildred, how you can care for anything so worthless."

She kissed him, and answered—

"Dearest, I had rather love you as you are than any other man alive. Time does wonders; perhaps in time you will get over it. Oh! Arthur! when I think of what she has made you, and what you might have been if you had never known her, I long to tell that woman all my

mind. But you must be a man, dear; it is weak to give way to a mad passion such as this is now. Try to think of something else; work at something."

"I have no heart for it, Mildred, I don't feel as though I could work; and, if you cannot make me forget, I am sure I do not know what will."

Mildred sighed, and did not answer. Though she spoke hopefully about it to him, she had little faith in his getting over his passion for Angela now. Either she must marry him as he was, or else let him go altogether, but which? The struggle between her affection and her idea of duty was very sore, and as yet she could come to no conclusion.

One thing there was that troubled her considerably, and this was that, though Madeira was almost empty, there were enough people in it to get up a good deal of gossip about herself and Arthur. Now, it would have been difficult to find anybody more entirely careless of the judgments of society than Mildred, more especially as her great wealth and general popularity protected her from slights. But, for all her oddities, she was a thorough woman of the world; and she knew, none better, that, in pursuance of an almost invariable natural law, there is nothing that lowers a woman so much in the estimation of a man as the knowledge that she is talked about, even though he himself is the cause of the talk. This may be both illogical and unjust, but it is, none the less, true.

But if Mildred still hesitated, Arthur did not. He was very anxious that they should be married; indeed, he almost insisted on it. The position was one that was far from being agreeable to him, for, from their very nature, all such intimacies must necessitate a certain

amount of false swearing. They are throughout an acted lie; and, when the lie is acted, it must sometimes be spoken. Now, this is a state of affairs that is repugnant to an honourable man, and one that not unfrequently becomes perfectly intolerable. Many is the love affair that comes to a sudden end because the man finds it impossible permanently to constitute himself a peregrinating falsehood. But, oddly enough, it has been found difficult to persuade the other contracting party of the validity of the excuse, and, however unjust it may be, one has known of men who have seen their defection energetically set down to more vulgar causes.

Arthur was no exception to this rule. He found himself in a false position, and he hated it. Indeed, he determined that before long he would place it before Mildred in the light of an alternative, that he should either marry her, or that an end should be put to their existing relations.

CHAPTER XXV.

MISS TERRY SPEAKS OUT.

As the autumn came on, a great south-west gale burst over Madeira, and went sweeping away up the Bay of Biscay. It blew for three days and nights, and was one of the heaviest on record. When it first began, the English mail was due; but when it passed there were still no signs of her, and prophets of evil were not wanting who went to and fro shaking their heads, and suggesting that she had probably foundered in the Bay.

Two more days went by, and there were still no signs of her, though the telegraph told them that she had left Southampton Docks at the appointed time and date. By this time, people in Madeira could talk of nothing else.

"Well, Arthur, no signs of the *Roman*?" said Mildred, on the fifth day.

"No, the *Garth Castle* is due in to-day. Perhaps she may have heard something of her."

"Yes," said Miss Terry, absently; "she may have fallen in with some of the wreckage,"

"I must say that is a cheerful suggestion," answered Arthur. "She is an awful old tub, and, I daresay, ran before the gale for Vigo, that is all."

"Let us hope so," said Mildred, doubtfully. "What is it, John?"

"The housemaid wishes to speak to you, please, ma'am."

"Very good; I will come."

It has been hinted that Agatha Terry was looking absent on the morning in question. There was a reason for it. For some time past there had been growing up in the bosom of this excellent lady a consciousness that things were not altogether as they should be. Miss Terry was not very clever, indeed it may be said that she was dense, but still she could not but see that there was something odd in the relations between Arthur and Mildred. For instance, it struck her as unusual that two persons who were not married, nor even, so far as she knew, engaged, should habitually call each other "dear," and even sometimes "dearest."

But on the previous evening, when engaged in a search after those species of beetles that love the night, she chanced to come upon the pair standing together on the museum verandah, and, to her horror, even in that light, she saw that Mildred's arm was round Arthur's neck, and her head was resting on his heart. Standing aghast, she saw more; for presently Mildred raised her hand, and, drawing Arthur's head down to the level of her own, kissed him upon the face.

There was no doubt about it, it was a most deliberate kiss—a kiss without any extenuating circumstances. He was not even going away, and Agatha could only come to one conclusion, that they were either going to be married—or "they ought to be."

She sought no more beetles that evening, but on the following morning, when Mildred departed to see the housemaid, leaving Arthur and herself together on the

verandah, she thought it was her "duty" to seek a little information.

"Arthur," she said, with a beating heart, "I want to ask you something. Are you engaged to Mildred?"

He hesitated, and then answered.

"No, I suppose not, Miss Terry."

"Nor married to her?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"Because I think you ought to be."

"I quite agree with you. I suppose that you have noticed something?"

"Yes, I have. I saw her kissing you, Arthur."

He blushed like a girl.

"Oh! Arthur," she went on, bursting into tears, "don't let this sort of thing go on, or poor Mildred will lose her reputation; and you must know what a dreadful thing that is for any woman. I know very little, but I know that. Why don't you marry her?"

"Because she refused to marry me."

"And yet—and yet she kisses you—like that!" added Miss Terry, as the peculiar fervour of the embrace in question came back to her recollection. "Ah, I don't know what to think."

"Best not think about it at all, Miss Terry. It won't bear reflection."

"Oh! Arthur, how could you?"

He looked very uncomfortable as he answered—

"I know that I must seem a dreadful brute to you. I daresay I am; but, Miss Terry, it would, under all the

circumstances, be much more to the point, if you insisted on Mildred's marrying me."

"I dare not. You do not know Mildred. She would never submit to it from me."

"Then I must; and, what is more, I will do it now."

"Thank you, Arthur, thank you. I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you."

"There is no need to be grateful to the author of the mischief."

"And supposing she refuses—what will you do then?"

"Then I think that I shall go away at once. Hush! here she comes."

"Well, Arthur, what are you and Agatha plotting together? You both look serious enough."

"Nothing, Mildred—that is, only another sea-voyage."

Mildred glanced at him uneasily. She did not like the tone in his voice.

"I have a bit of bad news for you, Arthur. That fool, that idiot, Jane"—and she stamped her little foot upon the pavement—"has upset the mummy hyacinth-pot and broken the flower off just as it was coming into bloom. I have given her a quarter's wages and her passage back to England, and packed her off."

"Why, Mildred," remonstrated Miss Terry, "what a fuss to make about a flower!"

She turned on her almost fiercely.

"I had rather have broken my arm, or anything short of my neck, than that she should have broken that flower. Arthur planted it, and now the clumsy girl has destroyed it," and Mildred looked as though she were going to cry.

As there was nothing more to be said, Miss Terry went away. As soon as she was gone, Mildred turned to Arthur and said—

“You are right, Arthur; we shall never see it bloom in this world.”

“Never mind about the flower, dear; it cannot be helped. I want to speak to you of something more important. Miss Terry saw you kiss me last night, and not unnaturally she is anxious to know what it all means.”

“And did you tell her?”

“Yes.”

It was Mildred's turn to blush now.

“Mildred, you must listen to me. This cannot go on any more; either you must marry me, or——”

“Or what?”

“Or I must go away. At present our whole life is a lie.”

“Do you really wish me to marry you, Arthur?”

“I not only wish it; I think it necessary.”

“Have you nothing more to say than that?”

“Yes, I have to say that I will do my best to make you a good and faithful husband, and that I am sure you will make me a good wife.”

She dropped her face upon her hands and thought.

Just then Miss Terry came hurrying up.

“Oh, Arthur!” she said, “just think, the *Roman* is in, after all, but all her boats are gone, and they say that half of her passengers and crew are washed overboard; do go down and see about it.”

He hesitated a little.

“Go, dear,” whispered Mildred. “I want time to think. I will give you my answer this afternoon.”

Mildred sat still on the verandah thinking, but she had not been there many minutes before a servant came with her English letters that had been brought by the unfortunate *Roman*, and at the same time informed her that the *Garth Castle* had been sighted, and would anchor in a few hours. Mildred reflected that it was not often they got two English mails in one day. She began idly turning over the packet before her. Of late letters had lost much of their interest for Mildred.

Presently, however, her hand made a movement of almost electric swiftness, and the colour left her face, as she seized a stout envelope directed in a hand of peculiar delicacy to "Arthur Heigham, Esq., care of Mrs. Carr, Madeira." Mildred knew the handwriting, she had seen it in Arthur's pocket-book. It was Angela Caresfoot's. Next to it there was another letter addressed to Arthur in a hand that she did not know, but bearing the same postmarks, "Bratham" and "Roxham." She put them both aside, and then took up the thick letter and examined it. It had two peculiarities—first, it was open, having come unsealed in transit, and been somewhat roughly tied up with a piece of twine; and secondly, it contained some article of jewellery—at least, Mildred judged that it was jewellery. Indeed, by dint of a little pressing on the outside paper, she was able to form a pretty accurate opinion as to what it was. It was a ring. If she had turned pale before when she saw the letter, she was paler still now.

"Heavens!" she thought, "why does she send him a ring? Has anything happened to her husband? If she is a free woman, I am lost."

Mildred looked at the letter lying open before her, and a terrible temptation took possession of her. She took it up and put it down again, then again she took it up, wiping the cold perspiration from her forehead.

"My whole life is at stake," she thought.

Then she hesitated no longer, but taking the letter, slipped off the piece of twine, and drew its contents from the envelope. The first thing to fall out, wrapped in a little cotton-wool, was the ring. She looked at it, and recognized it as Arthur's engagement ring, the same that Lady Bellamy had taken with her. Then, putting aside the statement, she deliberately unfolded the letter, and read it.

Do not think too harshly of her. The temptation was very sore. But, when one yields to temptation, retribution is not unfrequently hard upon its track, and it would only have been necessary to watch Mildred's face to see if she had sinned that the sin went hand in hand with punishment. In turn, it took an expression of astonishment, grief, awe, and despair. She read the letter to the last word, then she took the statement and glanced through it, smiling once or twice as she read. Next she replaced everything in the envelope, and, taking it, together with the other letter addressed to Arthur, unbuttoned the top of her loose-bodied white dress, and placed them in her bosom.

"It is over," she said to herself, "I can never marry him now. That woman is as far above me as the stars, and, sooner or later, he would find it all out. He must go, ah, God! he must go to marry *her*. Why should I not destroy these letters, and marry him to-morrow? bind him to me by a tie that no letters can ever break! What!

purchase his presence at the price of his daily scorn? Oh! such water is too bitter for me to drink! I have sinned against you, Arthur, but I will sin no more. Good-bye, my dear, good-bye!"

And she laid her throbbing head upon the rail of the verandah, and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GO, ARTHUR, GO!

ABOUT three o'clock that afternoon Arthur returned to the Quinta, having lunched on board the *Roman*. He found Mildred sitting in her favourite place on the museum verandah. She was very pale, and, if he had watched her, he would have seen that she was trembling all over, but he did not observe her particularly.

"Well," he said, "it is all nonsense about half the crew being drowned; only one man was killed, by the fall of a spar, poor fellow! They ran into Vigo, as I thought. The other mail is just coming in—but what is the matter, Mildred? You look pale."

"Nothing, dear; I have a good deal to think of, that is all."

"Ah, yes! Well, my love, have you made up your mind?"

"Why did I refuse to marry you before; for your sake, or mine, Arthur?"

"You said—absurdly, I thought—for mine!"

"And what I said I meant, and what I meant, I mean. Look me in the face, dear, and tell me, upon your honour as a gentleman, that you love me, really love me, and I will marry you to-morrow."

"I am very fond of you, Mildred, and I will make you a good and true husband."

"Precisely; that is what I expected, but it is *not* enough for me. There was a time when I thought that

I could be well satisfied if you would only look kindly upon me, but I suppose that *l'appétit vient en mangeant*, for, now you do that, I am not satisfied. I long to reign alone. But this is not all. I will not consent to tie you, who do not love me, to my apron-strings for life. Believe me, the time is very near when you would curse me, if I did. You say"—and she rose and stretched out her arm—"that you will either marry me or go. I have made my choice. I will not beat out my heart against a stone. I will *not* marry you. Go, Arthur, go!"

A great anxiety came into his face.

"Do you fully understand what you are saying, Mildred? Such ties as exist between us cannot be lightly broken."

"But I will break them, and my own heart with them, before they become chains so heavy that you cannot bear them. Arthur"—and she came up to him, and put her hands upon his shoulders, looking, with wild and sorrowful eyes, straight into his face—"tell me, now, dear—do not palter, or put me off with any courteous falsehood—tell me, as truly as you will speak upon the judgment-day, do you still love Angela Caresfoot as much as ever?"

"Mildred, you should not ask me such painful questions; it is not right of you."

"It is right; and you will soon know that it is. Answer me."

"Then, if you must have it, *I do*."

Her face became quite hard. Slowly she took her hands from his shoulders.

"And you have the effrontery to ask me to marry you with one breath, and to tell me this with the next. Arthur, you had better go. Do not consider yourself under any false obligation to me. Go, and go quickly."

"For God's sake, think what you are doing, Mildred!"

"Oh! I have thought—I have thought too much. There is nothing left but to say good-bye. Yes, it is a very cruel word. Do you know that you have passed over my life like a hurricane, and wrenched it up by the roots?"

"Really, Mildred, you mystify me. I don't understand you. What can be the meaning of all this?"

She looked at him for a few seconds, and then answered, in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice.

"I forgot, Arthur; here are your English letters;" and she drew them from her bosom and gave them to him. "Perhaps they will explain things a little. Meanwhile, I will tell you something. Angela Caresfoot's husband is dead; indeed she was never *really* married to him." And then she turned, and slowly walked towards the entrance of the museum. In the boudoir, however, her strength seemed to fail her, and she sank on to a chair.

Arthur took the letter, written by the woman he loved, and warm from the breast of the woman he was about to leave, and stood speechless. His heart stopped for a moment, and then sent the blood bounding through his veins like a flood of joy. The shock was so great that for a second or two he staggered, and nearly fell. Presently, however, he recovered himself, and another and very different thought overtook him.

Putting the letters into his pocket, he followed Mildred into the boudoir. She was sitting, looking very faint, upon a chair, her arms hanging down helplessly by her side.

"Mildred," he said, hoarsely.

She looked up with a faint air of surprise.

"What, are you not gone?"

"Mildred, beyond what you have just said I know nothing of the contents of these letters; but whatever they may be, here and now, before I read them, I again offer to marry you. I owe it to you and to my own sense of what is right that I should marry you."

He spoke calmly, and with evident sincerity.

"Do you know that I read your letter just now, and had half a mind to burn it; that I am little better than a thief?"

"I guessed that you had read it."

"And do you understand that your Angela is unmarried, that she was never really married at all—and that she asks nothing better than to marry you?"

"I understand."

"And you still offer to make me your wife?"

"I do. What do you say?"

A flood of light filled Mildred's eyes as she rose and confronted him.

"I say, Arthur, that you are a very noble gentleman, and, that though from this day I must be a miserable woman, I shall always be proud to have loved you. Listen, my dear. When I read that letter, I felt that your Angela towered over me like the Alps, her purity stained only by the reflected lights of heaven. I felt that I could not compete with such a woman as this, that I could never hope to hold you from one so calmly faithful, so dreadfully serene, and I knew that she had conquered, robbing me for Time, and, as I fear, leaving me beggared for Eternity. In the magnificence of her undying power, in the certainty of her command, she flings me your life as though it were nothing. 'Take it,' she says; 'he will never love you—he is mine; but I can afford to wait. I shall claim him before the throne of God.' But now, look

Arthur, if you can behave like the generous-hearted gentleman you are, I will show you that I am not behind in generosity. I will *not* marry you. I have done with you; or, to be more correct," and she gave a hard little laugh, "you have done with me. Go back to Angela, the beautiful woman with inscrutable grey eyes, who waits for you, clothed in her eternal calm, like a mountain in its snows. I shall send her that tiara as a wedding-present; it will become her well. Go back, Arthur; but sometimes, when you are cloyed with unearthly virtue and perfection, remember that a *woman* loved you. There, I have made quite a speech; you will always think of me in connection with fine words. Why don't you go?"

Arthur stood utterly confused.

"And what will you do, Mildred?"

"I!" she answered, with the same hard laugh. "Oh, don't trouble yourself about me. I shall be a happy woman yet. I mean to see life now—go in for pleasure, power, ritualism, whatever comes first. Perhaps, when we meet again, I shall be Lady Minster, or some other great lady, and shall be able to tell you that I am very, very happy. A woman always likes to tell her old lover that, you know, though she would not like him to believe it. Perhaps, too"—and here her eyes grew soft, and her voice broke into a sob—"I shall have a consolation you know nothing of."

He did not know what she meant; indeed, he was half-distracted with grief and doubt.

For a moment more they stood facing each other in silence, and then suddenly she flung her arms above her head, and uttering a low cry of grief, turned, and ran swiftly down the stone passage into the museum. Arthur hesitated for a while, and then followed her.

A painful sight waited him in that silent chamber; for there lay Mildred, stretched on the ground before the statue of Osiris, like some hopeless sinner before an inexorable justice, her brown hair touched to gold by a ray of sunlight from the roof, as still as though she were dead. He went to her, and tried to raise her, but she wrenched herself loose, and, in an abandonment of misery, flung herself upon the ground again.

"I thought it was over," she said, "and that you were gone. Go, dear, or this will drive me mad. Perhaps, sometimes you will write to me."

He knelt beside her and kissed her, and then he rose and went.

But for many a year he was haunted by that scene of human misery enacted in the chamber of the dead. Never could he forget the sight of Mildred lying in the sunlight, with the marble face of mocking calm looking down upon her, and the mortal frames of those who, in their day, had suffered as she suffered, and ages since had found the rest that she in time would reach, scattered all around—fit emblems of the vanity of passions which suck their strength from earth alone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PIGOTT AT MADEIRA.

WHEN Arthur passed the gates of the Quinta Carr he hurried to the hotel, with the intention of reading the letters Mildred had given him, and, going through the dining-room, seated himself upon the "stoep" which overlooked the garden in order to do so. At this time of year it was, generally speaking, a quiet place enough. But on this particular day scarcely had Arthur taken the letter from his pocket, and—having placed the ring that it contained upon his trembling finger, and repudiating the statement, marked "to be read first," on account of its business-like appearance—glanced at the two first lines of Angela's own letter, when the sound of hurrying feet and many chattering voices reminded him that he could expect no peace anywhere in the neighbourhood of the hotel. The second English mail was in, and all the crowd of passengers, who were at this time pouring out to the Cape to escape the English winter, had come, rejoicing, ashore, to eat, drink, be merry, and buy parrots and wicker chairs while the vessel coaled.

He groaned, and fled, in his hurry leaving the statement on the bench on which he was seated.

Some half-mile or so away, to the left of the town, where the sea had encroached a little upon the shore of the island, there was a nook of peculiar loveliness. Here the giant hand of Nature had cleft a ravine in the mountains that make Madeira, down which a streamlet trickled to the patch of yellow sand that edged the sea.

Its banks sloped like a natural terrace, and were clothed with masses of maidenhair fern interwoven with feathery grasses, while up above among the rocks grew aloes and every sort of flowering shrub.

Behind, clothed in forest, lay the mass of mountains, varied by the rich green of the vine-clad valleys, and in front heaved the endless ocean, broken only by one lonely rock that stood out grimly against the purpling glories of the evening sky. This spot Arthur had discovered in the course of his rambles with Mildred, and it was here that he bent his steps to be alone to read his letters. Scarcely had he reached the place, however, when he discovered, to his intense vexation, that he had left the enclosure in Angela's letter upon the verandah at the hotel. But, luckily, it chanced that, within a few yards of the spot where he had seated himself, there was a native boy cutting walking-sticks from the scrub. He called to him in Portuguese, of which he had learnt a little, and, writing something on a card, told him to take it to the manager of the hotel, and to bring back what he would give him. Delighted at the chance of earning sixpence, the boy started at a run, and at last Arthur was able to begin to read his letter.

Had Arthur not been in quite such a hurry to leave the hotel, he might have seen something which would have interested him. He might have seen a very lovely woman—so lovely, indeed, that everybody turned their heads to look at her as she passed, accompanied by another woman clad in a stiff black gown, not at all lovely, and rather ancient, but, for all that, well-favoured and pleasant to look on, who were being duly convoyed to their room in the hotel by his friend the manager.

"Well, thank my stars, here we be at last!" said the elderly stout person, with a gasp, as the door of the room closed upon the pair; "and it's my opinion that here I shall stop till my dying day, for, as for getting on board one of those beastly ships again, I couldn't do it, and that's flat. Now, look here, dearie, don't you sit there and look frightened, but just set to and clean yourself up a bit. I'm off downstairs to see if I can find out about things; everybody's sure to know everybody else's business in a place like this, because, you see, the gossip can't get out of a bit of an island, it must travel round and round till it ewaporates. I shall soon know if he is married or not, and if he is, why, what's done can't be undone, and it's no use crying over spilt milk, and we'll be off home, though I doubt I shan't live to get there, and if he isn't why so much the better."

"Oh! nurse, do stop talking, and go quickly; can't you see that I am in an agony of suspense? I must get it over one way or the other."

"Hurry no man's cattle, my dear, or I shall make a mess of it. Now, Miss Angela, just you keep cool; it ain't no manner of use flying into a state. I'll be back presently."

But, as soon as she was gone, poor Angela flew into a considerable state; for, flinging herself upon her knees by the bed, she broke into hysterical prayers to her Maker that Arthur might not be taken from her. Poor girl! alternately racked by sick fears and wild hopes, hers was not a very enviable position during the apparently endless ten minutes that followed.

Meanwhile, Pigott had descended to the cool hall, round which rows of hammocks were arranged, and was looking out for some one with whom to enter into conversation. A Portuguese waiter approached her, but she

majestically waved him away, under the impression that he could not speak English, though as a matter of fact his English was purer than her own.

Presently a pretty little woman, leading a baby by the hand, came up to her.

"Pray, do you want anything? I am the wife of the manager."

"Yes, ma'am, I want a little information—at least, there's another that does. Did you ever happen to hear of a Mr. Heigham?"

"Mr. Heigham? Indeed, yes; I know him well. He was here a few minutes since."

"Then perhaps, ma'am, you can tell me if he is married to a Mrs. Carr that lives on this island?"

"Not that I know of," she answered, with a little smile; "but there is a good deal of talk about them—people say that, though they are not married, they ought to be, you know."

"That's the best bit of news I have heard for many a day. As for the talk, I don't pay no manner of heed to that. If he ain't married to her, he won't marry her now, I'll go bail. Thank you kindly, ma'am."

At that moment they were interrupted by the entrance of a little ragged boy into the hall, who timidly held out a card to the lady to whom Pigott was talking.

"Do you want to find Mr. Heigham?" she said. "Because, if so, this boy will show you where he is. He has sent here for a paper that he left. I found it on the verandah just now, and wondered what it was. Perhaps you would take it to him if you go. I don't like trusting this boy—as likely as not he will lose it."

"That will just suit. Just you tell the boy to wait while I fetch my young lady, and we will go with him.

Is this the paper? And in her writing, too! Well, I never! There, I'll be back in no time."

Pigott went upstairs far too rapidly for a person of her size and years, with the result that she could only gasp when she reached their room, where Angela was waiting half dead with suspense.

"Well," said Angela, "be quick and tell me."

"Oh, Lord! them stairs!" gasped Pigott.

"For pity's sake, tell me the worst!"

"Now, miss, *do* give a body time, and don't be a fool—begging pardon for——"

"Oh, Pigott, you are torturing me!"

"Well, miss, you muddle me so—but I am coming to it. I went down them dratted stairs, and there I see a wonderful nice-looking party with a baby."

"For God's sake tell me—*is Arthur married?*"

"Why, no, dearie—of course not. I was just a-going to say——"

But whatever valuable remark Pigott was going to make is lost to the world for ever, for Angela flung her arms round her neck and began kissing her.

"Oh, oh! thank God—thank God! Oh, oh, oh!"

Whereupon Pigott, being a very sensible person, took her by the shoulders and tried to shake her, but it was no joke shaking a person of her height. Angela stood firm, and Pigott oscillated—that was the only visible result.

"Now, then, miss," she said, giving up the shaking as a bad job, "no highstrikes, *if* you please. Just you put on your hat and come for a bit of a walk in this queer place with me. I haven't brought you up by hand this two-and-twenty year or thereabouts, to see you go off in highstrikes, like a housemaid as has seen a ghost."

Angela stopped, and did as she was bid.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SUNSET, NIGHT, AND DAWN.

ARTHUR read his letter, and his heart burnt with love of the true woman whom he had dared to doubt. Then he flung himself upon the grass and looked at the ocean that sparkled and heaved before him, and tried to think; but as yet he could not. The engines of his mind were reversed full speed, whilst his mind itself, with quick shudders and confusion, still forged ahead upon its former course. He rose, and cast upon the scene around him that long look we give to the place where a great happiness has found us.

The sun was sinking fast behind the mountains, turning their slabbed sides and soaring pinnacles to giant shields and spears of fire. Beneath their mass, shadows—forerunners of the night—crept over the forests and the crested rollers, whilst further from him the ocean heaved in a rosy glow. Above, the ever-changing vault of heaven was of a beauty that no brush could paint. On a groundwork of burning red, height upon height, were piled deep ridges of purples and of crimsons. Nearer the horizon the colours brightened to a dazzling gold, till at length they narrowed to the white intensity of the half-hidden eye of the sun vanishing behind the mountains; while, underlying the steady splendour of the upper skies, flushed soft and melting shades of rose and lilac. Blue space above him was broken up by fantastic

clouds that floated all on fire, and glowed like molten metal. The reflection, too, of all these massed and varied lights in the azure of the eastern skies was full of sharp contrasts and soft surprises, and a travelling eagle, sailing through space before them, seemed to gather all their tints upon his vivid wings, and, as he passed away, to leave a rainbow track of broken light.

But such a glory was too bright to last. The sun sank swiftly, the celestial fires paled, the purples grew faint and died, and, where they had been, night trailed her sombre plumes across the sea and sky.

But still the quiet glow of evening lingered, and presently a line of light was shot athwart it, cutting a track of glory across the shadowed sea, so wild and sudden, that it might well have been the first ray of a resurrection morn breaking in upon the twilight of the dead.

He gazed almost in awe, till the majestic sight stilled the tumult of his heart, and his thoughts went up in thanks to the Creator for the pure love he had found again, and which had not betrayed him. Then he looked up, and there, stately and radiant, standing out clearly against the shadows, her face illumined by that soft, yet vivid light, her trembling arms outstretched to clasp him—was his lost Angela.

He saw her questioning glances fall upon him, and the red blood waver on her cheek; he saw the love-lights gather in her eyes; and then he saw no more, for she was in his arms, murmuring sweet broken words.

Happy are those who thus shall find their Angela, whether it be here,—or at Dawn, on the furthest shore of yonder solemn sea!

And Mildred? She lay there before the stone symbol of inexorable judgment, and sobbed till the darkness of the night covered her, and her heart broke in the silence of the night.

THE END.

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